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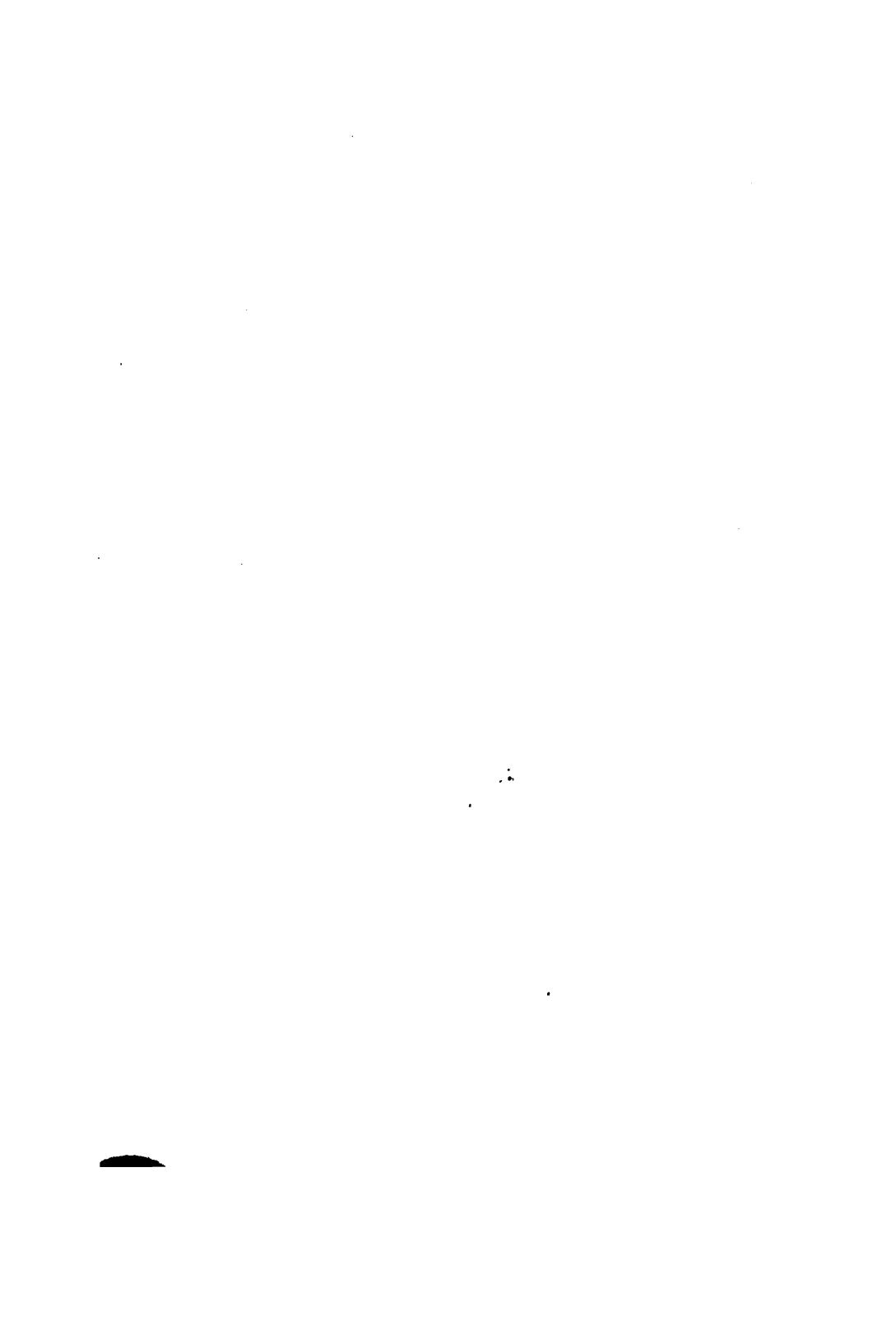
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1



GOBELIN GRANGE

GOBELIN GRANGE

BY

HAMILTON DRUMMOND

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1896



I

‘To LET, FURNISHED, for twelve months, or a term of years, as may be arranged, the highly eligible mansion of Gobelin Grange, a most picturesque ruin, with all modern conveniences—a really unique combination of eight centuries, well worth the consideration of the Society for Psychical Research. *N.B.*—Moat in thorough sanitary repair. Apply, etc. etc.’

The advertisement was all that could be desired; but being a cautious man it needed five interviews with the agent to bring me to the sticking-point. With the first four—which were the usual battledore and shuttlecock of objection, explanation, and asseveration—there is no need to trouble the reader; of the fifth a condensed report is given, since it in part describes Gobelin Grange, and suggests my object in seeking such a place. There are no mysteries, at least so far as I am concerned, no secrets; it is safest so, for it prevents dis-

appointment when the mountain only brings forth a mouse.

Even after the fifth interview I did not see the place. That again was my caution. I wanted it, meant to have it, and feared lest the too sad difference between expectation and realisation would rub the gilt off the gingerbread, human nature is so very hard to keep under. It is never wise to have too much experience. Now for the interview.

‘No, sir,’ said the agent; ‘I think when you consider the advantages you will admit that the price is not excessive. Let me go over them again.

‘The absolute quiet. No railway within eleven miles, and then it is not a station, and only a single line. The moat—I pledge you my professional reputation there are not seven undrained moats in England, and you will have one of them in most antique preservation. The house is a charming house, not magnificent—no; but you would not expect furnished magnificence for three hundred guineas a year—*not* magnificent, but cosy, comfortable, sufficiently inhabitable for you, and sufficiently—hum—ha—ruinous for the ghost; and we guarantee the ghost—absolutely guarantee the ghost.’

All this was very satisfactory, but as a pur-

chaser it was clearly my duty to deprecate the property. No self-respecting agent cares to close a bargain without a wrangle over details, so I grumbled, 'Eleven miles! and then not a station! Do you take me for a ghost myself that I am to live on air?'

'No trouble about that, sir; delightful old-fashioned village not a stone-throw from the gate. Tiled cottages, latticed windows stuck with bottle bottoms; Queen Anne and all that sort of thing. Butcher and baker and a hostelry; that's the word, I think, that—that Mr. Pickwick would have revelled in—fairly revelled in; no difficulty there, sir.'

So I shifted my ground; a moat—it had always been the dream of my life to own a moat, so of course I said—

'Then that ring of slime round the house which spells malaria, fever, and ague. Typhoid, eh?—that's the English of it?'

He looked grieved; not angry but hurt, much as Damon would have looked had Pythias called him a swindler.

'Now, sir, do I look like the man who would cheerfully send a fellow-creature to a premature grave—do I, sir, do I?'

That was an ugly way of putting it. You can't say to a man's face that he is willing to murder you light-heartedly for the commission

on three hundred guineas ; it somehow appears inadequate. So I waived the question aside and said :—

‘Now the apparition——’

But he gently interrupted me. ‘Not apparition, if you please, that suggests a sheet hung on a pole with a turnip on the top. We prefer to say ghost ; it is more descriptive, and a fine old Saxon word.’

‘Ay, that’s all very well,’ I answered ; ‘but words are neither here nor there, and for how long can you guarantee fixity of tenure ? How do I know but that Gobelín Grange may be left empty on my hands to-morrow ?’

The agent ‘smiled deprecatingly. ‘Of course,’ said he, ‘a ghost is not exactly like a sewing-machine or a piano.’

‘No,’ I broke in, ‘I should hope not. Imagination stands aghast before the last remnants of a deceased upright, or even grand——’

‘You mistake me,’ he went on gravely ; ‘I meant that the three year system does not quite apply, but I can assure you, sir, the former tenants had nothing to complain of on the grounds which you fear. He was regular, sir, entirely regular. You are a gentleman of a different temperament from your predecessors. To you I may say that the Gobelín is not so

much tapestry as ghost, and the former tenants found him a little too obvious ; some people are so difficult to please. When a ghost, sir, has a reputation of two hundred and thirty years—two hundred and thirty years—he may be said to be entirely regular. Guineas ? No ; let us say pounds and close the business.'

Pounds it was, and so I became the tenant of Gobelin Grange for one year certain.

You will probably get glimpses of the place as we go on, so any detailed description is unnecessary. My recollection is of a long night journey, a dreary wait at a wayside station, a still more dreary hour across country in a parliamentary, and a fifteen or twenty miles' drive (John and I differed sadly as to our estimates) through the bleakest country the bleakest county in England is ashamed of. Then a decaying gateway, a belt of ancient timber, a dozen acres of moor and heather, and Gobelin Grange.

The servants were two—caretakers apparently—and to them the agent had sent notice of my coming. Once shaken down in what the male member called the ' settin' room,' the campaign was opened briskly and with a nervous haste which suggested that the man had wound himself up to speak his mind at all costs.

‘My name’s David—juist David—it’s a fine name. There’ve been mony fine Davids i’ the warld. There was David, the King o’ Scotland, though ye’ll na ken much aboot him, and there was David, the King o’ Isr’el, and it’s less ye’ll ken o’ him, for to them as come doon here o’ their ain wull Saul and his witch o’ Endor ’ll be mair to the likin’, I’m thinkin’. Then there was David Watt, wha burnt his fingers wi’ the tap o’ the kettle, though they ca’d him Jeems for short; an’ David this an’ David that—hoot! the warld’s juist fu’ o’ grand Davids, an’ they’re no a’ deid yet; and then there’s Joan—that’s the wife; her name’s no Joan, but I juist ca’ her Joan for kindliness; it’s sae like Jonathan, ye ken—David an’ Jonathan; juist what husband an’ wife suld aye be—the best o’ freends.’

‘And what wages did your late employer pay you?’ I asked, when he stopped for breath.

It seemed best to bring him to something practical, as there was no time for him to prove his relationship to the entire Old Testament.

‘Come, sir,’ he answered briskly; ‘dinna say “late”; it soonds deid like. I’ll tell ye no lee; it was forty punds a year, an’ the hoose, an’ the gaardin stuff, an’ nae doot the agent pit a’ that doon in the agreement.’

I shook my head.

‘What, sir,’ he cried, ‘didna pit me doon a fixture wi’ the premises, an’ me mair a fixture than maist o’ them? The ingratitude o’ man! did ye ever see the like? An’ me sendin’ him fower bushels o’ salet for nae ither purpose, an’ paid the carrier body anither bushel to tak’ it tae the station; the railway robbers nae doot wad get their dues at the ither end!’

For half a minute speech was swallowed up in wrath, but from the working of David’s mouth I judged that the agent’s more or less remote future was in peril of much discomfort. ‘Black ingratitude; a fine fule he’s made o’ me!’ Then he changed his note.

‘I’m awfu’ handy, ye ken. I can gairden, an’ keep walks, or clean a horse, or wait at table wi’ ony man; an’ I’m nae frichted at the ghaist, nor Joan neither; an’, sakes me, what a cook the woman is!—ye never saw the like, the mair loss to me when there was nae maister to serve, for there’s aye bits, aye bits, an’ no even Joan hersel’ can mak’ parritch ither than parritch. We’ll juist say forty punds a year, sir, an’ the usell parquisites; they’re nae worth namin’ ane by ane.’

The man was a talking machine. If the permanent tenant of Gobelín Grange had endured it all these years, there need be little

fear now of a removal. Flesh and blood could not stand it, however, and now was the time to make terms.

‘David the nameless,’ I said sternly; and got no further, for he broke in.

‘No that, sir; Gude be wi’ us, no that, for it smells o’ the deevil, savin’ your presence. It’s David——’

But it was my turn.

‘It’s David Auchtermuchty, that’s what it is, and as I pay the bills I know best. Hold your tongue, David Auchtermuchty, and listen to me. Your name is as long as your wind; so I’ll call you David, and nothing else. Hush, will you! I’ll give you fifty pounds. I tell you hold your tongue till I’m done; you won’t talk so much then. Fifty pounds a year on one condition. Every time you speak without being first spoken to, I fine you sixpence. Do you understand, David? Open your lips and bang goes sixpence.’

David’s jaws wagged solemnly as if swallowing a too hot potato, but there was silence.

‘Now,’ I said briefly, ‘does Joan——’

‘Na, na, sir. Joan has a fine faculty o’ list’nin’, what for else wad I hae married her? It was her only tocher, an’ better nor siller it’s been to me. A quite tongue is a continual feast, ye ken, an’ sae Joan——’

‘Fetch her, man; and let me taste the banquet. I’ve been starving this hour past.’

In five minutes he returned with a grey-haired, grey-eyed woman of three times his bulk.

‘Well, Joan,’ I said, ‘David tells me you are a *cordon bleu*?’

‘Yer service, sir, and the Lord forgie him that he suld sae misca’ me, a decent woman, and his wife thae thrutty years.’

‘Eh? Oh well! it’s about dinner, you know. Bachelor’s fare will do; a good clear soup—fish we can do without for to-day—a sweet-bread, a wild duck, a savoury, and some pastry; anything simple; later on we can test your powers.’

That the bill of fare was interesting and satisfactory the moist corners of David’s mouth amply proved, but from behind him Joan looked stolidly down.

‘Is it denner, sir? Ye can hae pease brose, an’ maybe there’s a chop in the toon I could pit in the pan wi’ the petaties, but I’m no sure. It’s no killin’ day till to-morry, an’ the meat’s maistly bespoke.’

‘Quit your havers,’ snapped David. ‘Think shame to yersel’, woman, wi’ your bletherin’ o’ brose an’ mayhap collops. We’ll just borry a fat chuckie for the maister the day, an’ hae t’ither things anither time. A new-thrawn

pullet an' ane o' thae whippet-egg things wi' a spoonfu' o' jam 'll make shift for the nicht. An' if ye please, sir, ye'll no chairge me sax-pence for the thocht.' And I didn't.

These domestic affairs arranged—'Now,' I asked, 'what of this—ah—um—this—'

'Is it the ghaist, sir? Hoots, dinna fash yourself' aboot the ghaist; as quite a body, or appairance o' a body, as ever walked. Never a trick wi' him. Nane o' your high-cum-pops kind o' a ghaist to gar your saul flit intil your mou', but juist a gentleman, a fine quite gentleman that 'll gang his ain gait an' you gang yours.'

'Good,' said I, 'but in what part of the ruins does he gang his gait?'

For answer David laughed until he split his skull from ear to ear, and even Joan the stolid chuckled huskily. Then David went on.

'I tellt ye he was a gentleman, an' where wad gentlefolks bide, d'ye think? He kens weel the best o' this warld, an' he's right to tak' it, for I hae me doots o' his comfort in the t'ither. Nae need to gang till that cauld whustlin' rack; he'll come to meet ye himsel'. The Lord grant ye like it, for it's an awfu' place, this, wi' nane but Joan an' that thing tae speer at. But she's a fine cook, Joan, an' he's as quite a gentleman as ye ever crackt wi'; an' dinna ye be scairt, sir, dinna be scairt, but

tak' him as ain o' yoursels, an' it'll be a' richt; ye hae my word for that.' Which was comforting but ambiguous.

Tired by my long day's journey it seemed better to leave ghost-hunting out of that day's programme; so the afternoon was spent between unpacking and dodging David in the neglected garden.

Punctually at seven the ex-gardener, transformed into a gentleman's gentleman by a long coat of rusty black broadcloth, and an unstarched collar of Byronic dimensions but inverted shape, thrust his head and shoulders through the doorway.

'Denner's up,' he said; and disappeared, creaking his way downstairs to the dining-room, where, five minutes later, he received me with a self-appreciative grin. In his keen anxiety that there should be no loss of time, he had already removed the cover, and from the corner of the table behind my elbow he watched the carving operations with an almost fatherly interest.

'My conscience, but it's a grand bird. I aye kent Tammie Shaw's chuckies tae be——'

'David,' I said, 'David Auchtermuchty—sixpence.'

His face lengthened. 'Wae's me for a fule! Wad ye ring, sir, if ye want ae thing? It's no

safe for me to bide, I'm thinkin';' and he slipped from the room with the chastened mien of a man who had met with severe loss, muttering as he slowly closed the door—

‘It wad brack Creeses himsel', ay, or the Yearl o' Fife, sae it wad. It'll hae tae be stoppit, David, it'll hae tae be stoppit.’

Which was my opinion too. Thenceforward there was a creaking silence.

After the scanty residue of the ‘whippet eggs an' spoonfu' o' jam’ had been removed, I settled myself to the complete enjoyment of four soothing influences—quiet, the beauty of a perfect night, an admirable cigar, and the last two glasses of a bottle of excellent claret. Could a fifth delight be added? I think not.

The dusky yellow haze was still slowly dying in the woods when David creaked solemnly in, and in grim silence proceeded to close the shutters, but I stopped him.

‘Not yet, David, I think; the night is much too fine to be shut out so early; presently, in half an hour or later, will do.’

He looked at me in a helpless fashion for half a minute, then, as if I had never spoken, turned to the window again and closed the shutters briskly.

‘Didn't you hear me, David? Leave them alone till I tell you.’

‘Noo,’ said he, ‘that’s a question, and I can answer ye. Hear ye? oh ay; David the fule’s no deef, but it’s himsel’ that likes them shut by a hauf past acht at this time o’ year. The licht bothers him, I’m thinkin’, an’ it’s weel to humour him. Juist where the chiel comes frae is nane sae certain.’

‘Is it the——?’

‘Ay, ay, sir; wha else suld it be? I tellt ye he was a gentleman an’ didna haud wi’ thae tummle doon wa’s, but likit a Christian kind o’ a place; an’ the Lord forgie him for bein’ what he is.’

This was unexpected, and I hastily poured the last of the claret into my glass, and wished it had been port instead; it is so much warmer than claret, and there are times when even good claret has a chilling effect.

‘Eh? Oh very well, David, close them in, close them in; and if there’s anything you have to do about the room, why just go on, and there’s no hurry, David, no hurry; take your time, you know, take your time.’

‘Na, na, sir,’ he answered grimly, as he thrust to the shutters with quite unnecessary briskness, ‘I’m dune for the nicht. It’s airly wark i’ the mornin’ when ye’re gairdner as well as valley, sae I’ll wish ye a soond sleep, sir, an’ may ye no be disturbed.’ And as he

creaked to the door I heard him mutter, 'He'll no be so shairp wi' his saxpence here an' saxpence there anither time, I'm thinkin', David ma man.'

This was a desperate business. To be shut up in a close-barred room and wait for heaven knows what to come from heaven knows where, was not at all the ideal I had pictured. That had been a bold adventure down a mouldy corridor into some moonlit ruin beyond, and all the time-honoured picturesque accessories to screw the courage up to the sticking-point; but this—and I nervously dropped my cigar into my lap and spat out the stump—this was—plainly, this was the very devil.

For fifteen minutes, and each minute the snail's pace of an hour of waiting, I sat and stared at every shadow; then in desperation jumped to my feet and paced the room softly from end to end.

Curiously, there came the thought of a poem I had once read. How that the souls yet unborn, huddled in their limbo waiting the dateless but inevitable summons, suffered torments in the suspense, expectation, and uncertainty; consumed with desire for life, yet tortured with dread of the unknown. And so, insensibly, my thought shifted from myself, and I was quite unprepared for the quiet voice which

broke in upon my thought, and the presence which stood in the brightest flash of the lamp.

‘Disturbed you, I fear? Sorry indeed, but such a result is not unusual at first. Supposing you pull yourself together a little? I can return presently’; and so it went; went out like a failure of light, and left me staring.

The minutes dragged slowly enough, but three of them could not have passed before I heard the voice again.

‘Not a long absence, perhaps, but I find by experience that a lengthened expectation produces nervousness. Shall I leave you again? Not necessary? You are quite right, and I congratulate you; face the unknown and it loses its terrors.

‘By the way I owe you an apology for depriving you of the last of the day. The truth is I have an unsurmountable dislike to being the object of casual curiosity (a dislike which I understand is foreign to humanity) and therefore I avoid unshuttered windows. I have always pitied those unfortunates who can claim no seclusion. Your princes, criminals, and cabinet ministers. Doubtless, it is part of the price they pay for their position; but as a humble individual I refuse to be penalised. You quite understand my position, I am sure?’

The long speech was clearly intended to set me at my ease, and it succeeded perfectly.

‘Surely,’ I answered, ‘it is I rather who should have apologised for intruding on your private apartments by taking possession in this discourteous fashion; but my experience of—shall I say your kindred?—and I have had some little—led me to suppose you would have preferred the more antique quarter of the house—the—ah! ruins in fact.’

It shuddered visibly.

‘Scarcely my kindred, I think, as I have but one near relation, and it is improbable that you have met my cousin, Asmodeus.’

‘Asmodeus,’ I cried. ‘Then you are not a——?’

‘No—not a ghost, and if the agent has so affirmed, and you have rented the place on that understanding, you have good grounds for action for breach of warranty, or possibly you could break the bargain and throw the Grange on his hands—a course I would deeply regret.’

‘Nay,’ I cried eagerly, ‘on the contrary, I am his debtor, since it is to him I owe the pleasure of our meeting. But you are right—I have never met your relative, and, to be candid, I should add, I am not sorry.’

‘No?’ and It sighed. ‘I suppose his character is none of the best. There are good and

bad in most families.' Then It added modestly, 'There are but two in ours, and yet it is no exception.'

'But have you noticed,' I answered, 'how that, though natures vary, tendencies remain. The thirst for blood that in one finds no satiation but in murder, in another is quenched by the slaughter of so many pigeons at fifteen yards' rise. The taint that impels the sordid miser to grasp ill-gotten wealth for hoarding's sake, may soften to the mild ambitions of the numismatist, or even develop a postage-stamp collector.'

It looked at me thoughtfully for a brief space before It replied. 'You are an observer, I see, and your observation has led you aright. Like my cousin, Asmodeus, I, too, have my curiosities, not that I may rejoice over the littleness of man's motives, but rather that I agree with that poet of yours—

The proper study of mankind is man,

and being unhappily debarred the parallel of the thought, I have stepped down to the level of the poet student.'

'What a rich accumulation of experience you must have had?'

'Yes,' It said diffidently. 'I suppose you would say so. Would you care—that is, would

it interest you to hear some of the little things I have noted? They are slight, entirely slight, mere everyday occurrences; but if you have nothing better to do?

I hadn't, for it was scarcely bed-time: when that hour arrived the reminiscences could be postponed.

'Of course,' It went on, 'you understand that I assume a character, or speak in the third person as the fancy takes me.'

'Let me see—I think I will tell you the story of John Scott's wife; it interested me rather at the time.'

Red Bluff city takes its name from that sudden outcrop of reddish sandstone which so sharply breaks the dead level of the plain. Wedge-like it thrusts itself into the angle made by the curve of a stream whose waters wash it on two sides. A stream shallow enough in the drought of summer, but in winter full of turbid, sluggish strength.

Its natural adaptability to defence in the midst of a well-watered country had appealed to the alert instincts of the earliest settlers, and the encampment upon its summit of a train of prairie schooners, back in the fifties, was the nucleus of Red Bluff city.

Essentially a western creation, Red Bluffs is

typical of much that is strong and admirable in western development. After the first huddling together for mutual protection, the growth of the town was slow; the tide of greed or necessity swept westward, pushing forward fresh outposts with every spring, and the miniature plateau which crowned the Bluff was for many years amply large to accommodate the settlers.

But the tide of immigration was an ever-rising one, and as the increasing importance of 'The Bluffs' as a distributing centre became recognised, so gradually the irregular houses crept down the slope upon both sides, and trailed in each direction along the river's edge.

To trace the rise and growth of the city is beside the purpose; it would be the story of a score or more of prosperous centres of busy population in the land which forty years ago was the freehold of the Indian, or the undisputed heritage of nature.

Some of these days Red Bluff city will adopt a less cumbersome name, and one more in keeping with the potential capital of a great state; but that will not be until the pioneer generation has been swept away; for, in spite of rigours of the past, a tender recollection still clings round the early association.

Strong, energetic, animated by a most whole-

some activity ; restless and ambitious, grasping, not for the sake of gain, but for the sake of growth, if the spirit of Red Bluff city could have become incarnate, it would have called itself John Scott.

From the earliest beginnings John Scott had grown with the city, for he was a bare-headed, shoeless, sunburnt urchin attached to the first caravan of pioneers which settled upon Red Bluffs. With its growth he had grown ; and as its wealth increased, so had his.

John Scott the elder, shrewdly foreseeing the possibilities of the place, pre-empted as many lots of 160 acres as he thought the long-suffering and paternal government at Washington would pass without inquiry. The officials at the land office must have been struck with admiration at the touching family affection which held together so many Scotts in such a lonely district. Not Jacob, when he descended to the land of plenty, had a larger list of relatives than John Scott had on paper, though in the flesh he was a widower with an only son. A man of too wide sympathies to be limited by niggard nature, he hailed his every horse and steer from Abner to Zadkiel as a brother or a cousin.

All of these many lots did not descend to John the younger. Immigration must be

encouraged so that the value of real estate may rise; so sundry parcels were judiciously sold to the family advantage, and great ultimate enhancement in the value of the more profitable land still retained. Streets spread themselves, banks were established, wharves laid out, and from each and every enterprise John Scott, as the man with the biggest brain and the longest purse, reaped an advantage.

In the fulness of time the younger succeeded to the elder, and, having inherited a shrewdness capable of compelling fortune, had wealth not been his already, he not only held his own securely, but added materially to the accumulations.

During the thirty or forty years which followed the first settlement on Red Bluffs, the surrounding country rapidly filled up. Broad cattle ranges extended in all directions, and flourished exceedingly; at least those did which marched with the river; but the prosperity of those which, unfortunately for themselves, were dependent upon water-holes, and such precarious means of supply, fluctuated sorely.

To their owners a prolonged drought spelt ruin, and in a month the profits of a fat year would be swept away. Their necessity was John Scott's opportunity, and many were the mortgages he held. It was commonly said

that the best part of five counties was locked away in his safe.

A busy, cool-headed, practical man, adjusting all things to the scale of profit and loss ; measuring, so to speak, all schemes upon the Procrustean bed of his own interests and compelling them to fulfil his objects ; he seemed the last man in Red Bluffs to fall under gentler influences. No one credited the rumour that he was going to marry, and the development of the rumour that he was going to marry the daughter of 'Busted Maxwell' was rejected with indignation.

The wits suggested that perhaps he was taking her as a bad debt ; a jest which bore its fruit further on, for Maxwell's Ranch was one of John Scott's few unprofitable bargains. Nevertheless the rumour was true, and when it crystallised into certainty there was an ominous absence of congratulations, which John Scott noticed not at all.

To him it was a purely personal matter ; and he had never been in the habit of allowing the public to take the liberty of expressing interest in his private affairs. Clear-headed in all matters governed by experience, he was ignorant of the value of sympathetic approval. It was not that his pride ignored the silence ; he simply never knew it existed.

At length, one of the successful man's legion friends, an associate in many a well-planned speculation, a counsellor whose advice John Scott valued almost as his own, undertook the not uncongenial task of expressing public opinion.

What passed at that brief interview was never known; but the elevator boy declared that 'the first ghost ever seen in Red Bluffs must have tackled old man Cox in Mr. Scott's office, for the deacon looked scared to death, and he hadn't been there more than five minutes, neither.'

After that, public opinion relieved its feelings in private; and John Scott married Mary Maxwell a full three months sooner than had been originally fixed.

If this was his answer to Red Bluffs, then it was characteristic of the man; but the explanation might have been found in the moving west of the bankrupt rancher making it necessary that Mary should find a home.

It was early winter when Mary Scott took possession of the big flat at the top of the Bluffs on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Third Street; Mrs. John Scott she could never be,—not all her husband's wealth could ever transform her into that,—and the huge lonely rooms chilled her with their silence.

Too shy to seek society ; too tame, too placid, perhaps, to compel it, the tide of life passed her by, leaving her the more lonely for the echo of its turmoil at her door.

Self-contained and reticent, John Scott found an outlet for his energies in the excitement of his many schemes ; up to this time work had been the passion of his life, and from force of habit he taught himself to believe that this was still the truth. The necessities of a life clinging to him for support he understood not at all ; and all the less for the self-suppression into which his wife had schooled herself.

Her father, blunt-spoken and coarse-grained, had made it very clear that a man of John Scott's wealth could never really love the daughter of a penniless bankrupt, even though he gratified his whim and married her. So Mary Scott looking for no love, saw none.

It was well into the fall when John Scott, third of his line, appeared upon the scene, and of a sudden the lonely flat was peopled with all the joys the best of all possible worlds affords. The fountains of love were broken up. The consecration of life lit every darkened corner, John Scott the father was as a child with mother and child ; and there were halcyon days when the birds of calm built their nests undisturbed.

It must be confessed that, outwardly at least,

Mary the mother expanded rather towards John, the marvellous babe, than in the direction of John, the diffident father. All the suppressed tenderness of loving womanhood, crowned by the sacred emotions of maternity, seemed lavished on the boy, and none but her hands should spend the loving labour of daily care his helplessness necessitated.

In his secret heart, John, the father, could almost have found resentment enough to openly rebel against the unconscious tyranny. Still, the days were Indian summer; but, as is its way, Indian summer slipped all too soon into the chill and dreary splash of winter.

It was somehow in this fashion. During an exciting hour in the wheat pit, when 'futures' were flying up point by point at every call, and John Scott's gains rolling up like a snowball, he heard brokenly through the din of yelling voices, 'John Scott—made of money—why his wife married him—score of years younger—poor devil.' Who spoke he never knew, the howling of the profit-grubbing demon was loud as ever, but his ears seemed dulled.

With a jerk he snapped-to his pocket-book and strode out of the pit, out of the Exchange, into his own office, and sat down to think. It was strange how the pressure of office work kept him late that day, and when at last the

big flat was reached, its atmosphere seemed changed, suddenly struck grey and chilly.

It was curious, but that very day Mary Scott too had had her experiences: one of these coincidences which knit together the tragedies of life.

Since the boy came, a few of the Red Bluff women-folk had come about her in a shame-faced fashion. Their presence added nothing to the mother's happiness, but they had their uses, for could she not show her treasure for their admiration? To do them justice, this they gave ungrudgingly. It is unaccountable to the male mind, but the baby question is the neutral ground where opposing forces can meet and be at peace!

One of these belated matrons had shed her presence on the big flat that afternoon, and after due recognition of 'the cunning sweetness of the dimpled rogue,' had said, 'He binds you two together, dear. No need now to talk of seizing for a bad debt,' and the thoughtless, cruel jest came out afresh. It was not until afterwards that the meaning crushed home to her brain, and gripped her heart as frost will grip a flower—a bad debt—the forlorn hope of a bad bargain—the very folly of the idea should have been its corrective, but the foolishness never struck her. Boy was banished to

his cot in the back room, and the mother sat alone in the biggest room of the big flat—alone, like the father, to think.

Had John Scott been in a tender mood that night he would have seen the piteous stricken love in her eyes; but the breath of winter swept in with him, and insight and confidence were both dimmed by a frozen crust.

So within and without alike there settled down a killing chill. The busy man could no longer find spare moments to waste in the big flat. The mother, devoted to newer claims upon her love, could give but little thought to anything less dear.

It was weeks before the crisis came; he, on his part, while quick to act, was slow to form conclusions; she, placid, and through early training living much within herself, held herself in firm control.

The winter had slipped away. The snow was already gone from the plains, and was fast melting on the spurs of the far-off mountains where sprang the river which washed by the wharves of Red Bluff. For weeks the stream had been in freshet, and now it was swollen sluggish with the melted snow.

Neither knew how it happened; it was late in the evening, and a pressure of work—a real pressure in truth—called John Scott back to his

office. A seeming cold good-night on his part, a turning from him to the boy on hers—a triviality that had happened a dozen times before, but was this one time too often.

On both sides the smothered resentment broke out in hot words, the hotter for the pain pride hid with such scrupulous care. And John Scott, standing at the half-open door, flung into his wife's face with a taunt that he would free her and himself if he could—and was gone.

While the echo of the closing door lasted, she stood staring at the barrier he had set up between them; then the excitement died out of her eyes, and she turned once more to the boy, her face set like a flint, and her lips white as her cheeks.

One minute to snatch him from his pillows, another to wrap him in a shawl—for it was bitterly cold outside for all the coming of spring—a third minute, and the big flat echoes again to the closing of the door, and she was out in the street in the white of a half-high moon.

The rain had ceased, and the sky was blown free from cloud. The streets were deserted; dimly she remembered there was some great gathering in the town. Down the sodden slope of the Bluff she plodded, the moon in her face and a black shadow flitting behind. Down to the bridge spanning the stream just below its

bend, at the curve of the Bluff ; over the bridge, and down to the water at the further bank.

At the brink of the stream she paused. Disturbed by the cessation of motion the boy on her breast stretched his tiny length and thrust his arms, white like slender silver bars, into the moonlight ; then he drew a sigh of contentment and settled to rest again, as she folded the shawl about him anew. For a moment she seemed in doubt what next to do. Whish—whish, went the river, with now and then the wash of a petty crest thrown back from the projecting buttress of the bridge, and the lap and gurgle of the wavelets beating rhythmically against the stones at her feet.

Then, her mind made up, she turned from the water, and stooping in the blackest shadow laid down her boy, kissing the puckered lips, and drawing the shawl with steady solicitude over the head and across the arms.

Down on her knees, rocking, swaying, choking, but touching her son no more lest he should awake ; was it a cry, or the breaking of her heart-strings that burst from her ?

Now into the water. No hesitation, no halting, on over the slimy shingle and slippery stones ; on, splashing, staggering in the fierce haste to death under the shadows of the gaunt bridge, out from the shallows, up beyond the

waist, up, up ; and then, ' My baby ; my boy, O God, I can't give him up ' ; and, back to the shore again, back steadily. She must not fall lest she drown too soon ; back to the shallows, then a wild rush, and the soft face of the boy is against her neck ; and she, mouthing him, as with unsatiable heart hunger, out into the depths again.

Looking under the arches, the river shows white in the moonlight, white and level as a snowfield, broken only by foam-drifts from the turmoil of the higher waters. Round to the right it curves, and is swallowed in the blackness of the overhanging banks, then swiftly the silver of the river again flashes out.

Suddenly, as she stands waist deep staring into the moonlight, a something sweeps steadily, slowly down the stream towards the arch under which she stands. Curled this way and that by the flow of the current it shows rough and irregular in shape, altering every second as it drifts nearer and nearer, and the moon seeks out a white sightless face ; and out of the glimmer, into the black shadow where she stands, John Scott drifts to his wife.

She understands it all in a flash ; he has died for her sake. The thought surges hotly to her brain how he must have loved her, and she never knew it !

The current is strong just there ; it is all she can do to keep foothold, and the weight of the body almost throws her back.

Her impulse is to fling herself face down on that dear face, and drift to death together.

Then—‘He loves me ! There is life and love for us yet’ : and as the heavy body swings aside in the current she grips an outstretched arm, and with all the strength of a mad excitement battles for the shore. But the weight drags her down stream, and she has but one arm to fight with, the other is around her boy.

Long ago, it seems long ago ; ten seconds perhaps, she had shouted with all her power for help, but without reply, and she remembers with despair that not a soul has crossed the bridge since her coming.

Slowly the weight drags her down stream and into deeper waters ; slowly, but with a deadly certainty. If she had only two hands she would save him yet, but instead she slips a foot or two further, a yard. Hope is almost over ; then, with scarcely a sob, she lets the boy slip from her, and with desperate strength drags John Scott inch by inch, out of the blackness to where the moon frosts the foam flecked upon the slippery stones.

And fifty yards down stream a white bundle rolls over and over in the current.

It is hard to understand such individualities. It was only seventeen minutes past eleven when It ceased speaking; and yet, without another syllable, It went out like the snuffing of a candle.

II

IT is on record that on a historic occasion a certain gardener failed to get up sufficiently early to catch the worm. Indeed it was the other thing which happened, thanks to the woman in the case. But that was no reason why David should have disturbed me at unwholesome hours. It could not have been much, say twenty minutes, past nine next morning when he came rattling at the door and crying—

‘Are ye no gaun tae wauken the day ava’? It’s awfu’ late.’ Then opening the door he slid in. ‘Hech! but he’s been sleepin’! that’s bonny. Sae ye’ll no be gaein’ awa’ the day, an’ ye didna order thae things for your denner. Man, but I was awfu’ frichted for ye. Here hae I been settin’ in the cauld syne the bell clappit seeeven, thinkin’ ilk meenit to hear ye come stampin’ doon the hoose bawlin’ for your carriage, an’ you sleepin’ like a babe the whiles.

Ay, but it's an awfu' loss, for it's a gran' mornin' for pettin' in leeks ; they dibble fine the noo.

'Did ye see It, sir? An' was he no juist a gentleman as I tellt ye?'

'Ay, David, I saw It. And, David, since It's an old acquaintance of yours, what is It like?'

The old man gasped as if I had struck below the belt. 'Did ye no see It yoursel', sir, that ye come speerin' at me?'

'What's It like?'

'Why, It's like—It's juist like naethin'.'

And David was right ; a dictionary could not have described it better. At first there had seemed to be a blur of white, the traditional garb of the ghost. Presently that had disappeared, and—really, it is almost too ridiculous, but if It was clad in anything it was in the conventional black and white of evening dress. Finally, could the whole thing have been a dream, for such transitions appear impossible? But finally there was the blue jean and broad sombrero of the pioneer.

'But Its face, David—Its face?'

'Awfu' strange, sir, but I never thocht on that before. It's a daft-like thing to say, but I dinna ken the noo hoo Its face lookit. No but what Its face was there whan It talkit wi' me, for to hae a crack wi' a heidless bundle o'

claes wad be a fearsome thing, an' It was no fearsome, but juist a fine gentleman. Maybe, sir, ye can tell me what It lookit like.' But I couldn't.

It was late in the afternoon when David came to me, and said with dishonest pride, 'I've done gran' for ye the day, sir. There were but twa chops doon to the flesher's, and they were bespoke by the doctor. But I tellt the man ye were terrible delicate, an' ye mun hae them; an' that ye had asket the doctor to denner wi' ye; an' Joan has the chops a' safe.'

'But, David,' I said, 'what nonsense is this? I have asked no one to dine.'

'Na, na, sir, dinna fash yoursel' aboot that. That was juist my haverin'. The doctor to denner indeed! Na, na, a loon that chairged me half-a-croon for twa visits an' ae bottle o' medicine wi'out a taste to the mou'! But Joan has the chops locket up, and the doctor may whustle for them.'

Truly, ghost hunting leads one into paths of doubtful honesty, but it is only justice to add that I never ate finer chops in my life.

'Half-a-crown is little enough, David, to pay a man for your life; but you know its value best. How much should it have been?'

'It's no that, sir; it's the mairket valley o'

the thing, an' a shellin' a visit wad hae ped that well, an' the bottle wasna worth tuppence, a fraud o' a fowerpenny piece to my thinkin'.'

The clock was barely at eight that night when I rang for David. He had been unnaturally silent throughout the dinner, and now stood peering at me from the doorway.

'Close the shutters, David,' I said. 'It looks as if it would darken early.'

'Na, na,' he answered; 'it's a braw nicht, nae fear for it.'

'Well, well, I don't like the glare; close them in, close them in.'

'Hoots,' he said contemptuously; 'I ken fine what ye mean, but it's nae gude. Div ye think It doesna ken the time o' day better nor yoursel'? But I'll dae it, sir. I'll dae it. It's aye a gude thing to dae the wull o' him that pays ye, when it's no again the conscience; an' my! but a saft conscience is a sair loss an' trouble at times, as I've nae doot ye've found oot yoursel'.'

When he had closed them he went on:

'It's no warth goin' for sic a twa three meenits as till hauf-past eight, sae I'll juist bide where I am.'

As the tone of this remark of David's conveyed an earnest intention, there was nothing for it but gently yet firmly to negative the pro-

position. There would have been an end of my reminiscences, for he would have argued with the devil himself, even at a cost of sixpence a sentence.

‘Ow! hae your wull, sir, hae your wull; but it’s a puir return till a man that perilled his saul to stay your wame wi’ another man’s meat.’ And as he slowly shuffled to the door I heard him say, ‘Esau sauld his bairtright for a boilin’ o’ parritch, an’ the mair fule he, but you’ve done waur, ye double fule, for you’ve sauld yoursel’, an’ anither has eaten the price.’

Presently the door was opened softly, and David’s head and shoulders appeared.

‘Ye’ll mind to tak’ tent o’ hoo It—losh me! It’s there Itsel’.

‘Sixpence, you crass idiot,’ I cried; ‘sixpence,’ and as the door slammed upon a groan, It said :

‘I see you know how to strike the keynote of all humanity.’

‘The love of money, you mean?’ I answered.

‘Ah, no; that is but a vibration of the note, loud enough; but the actual note is self. As one of your old poets has put it—

My mind to me a kingdom is.

The mind may vary, but in that self-centredness you have the race from its earliest forefather.'

'But,' I objected, 'that was neither the idea of the poet nor the moral of your last night's reminiscence.'

'True,' It replied; 'but as for the first, do not grudge the poet an unexpected truth, and as for the second, remember that you asked for an unusual experience, and I gave it. Not mine the blame if you find the unusual in the act and I in the motive. But, since you prefer the commonplace, I will try and fit your wishes with my recollection of the life and death of "Crœsus, M.P."'

That is what he was always called of late years. What names had been given him by his god-fathers and god-mothers at baptism do not really matter; his fame, such as it was, was due to his money; and therefore, as our friends across the channel would say, he is Crœsus, M.P., all short.

Neither are his politics of any importance. Any highly respectable Party (with a capital P) can command a dozen such as he, and is thankful to pay for the privilege with peerages, or how else would the war chests for the penniless men of brains be filled?

Whether Blue or Buff, Orange or Green, high dry Tory or red-hot Radical, matters nothing. He was Crœsus, M.P., and no tolerant yet self-respecting inquirer can ask more.

Not a rising man ; no man who is doing his utmost to test the truth of the saying, 'And if by reason of strength four score years' can be called a rising man ; he has either risen or is an irreparable failure ; either the crown of 'peace with honour' is his, or the point is reached of which Pitt said, 'Surely age justly becomes contemptible.' Crœsus, therefore, was a man who had risen. He was more. He was a notable man. Strangers in the House craned their necks uncomfortably to see the smooth fresh face with its white fringe of thin hair framing it like a silver halo, and whispered, 'Crœsus,' licking their lips with satisfaction the while, for Crœsus was an incarnation.

At city banquets he was a sure card, a calmly conscious object-lesson of how to be successful, for was not his wealth coined out of his own brain ? Whether from the limbo behind the grille, where the soul of the nation may admire its brains, or from other and circling galleries where it may watch the pockets of the nation overeat themselves, there was but one opinion—Crœsus, M.P., was such a dear

man. It may be that in the domestic circle (that is the phrase, is it not?) there was a more reluctant admiration; who was that cynical plagiarist who said no man is a hero to his valet, and thereby spoilt and vulgarised a much finer saying about a prophet and his honour? No doubt the wit applied for thirty or forty years in West Africa would spoil the temper of an angel; and Croesus had not been an angel since he was a cherub. And it may be that the buying up of post-obits, even at a large discount because of the subject's health, does not conduce to paternal affection. There had been a daughter, but when she was mentioned people shook their heads—we all know how to damn a reputation by a well-conceived ignorance—shook their heads, I say, and sighed, 'Poor Croesus.' As for Mrs. Croesus, society had never known her.

Every man has his critics. Failures are mercilessly anatomised by the keen incisors of success. Success is pounded out of shape by the ponderous cudgelings of failure; and the man must be poor indeed in whom envy will not pick a flaw. Croesus, therefore, had his critics. They were probably right, and it was the weakest of trite platitudes to say that a clear conscience and half a life on the Gold Coast were mutually destructive. But in the

early fifties it was a far cry to West Africa, and Crœsus no doubt had done his duty by his generation and advanced British interests, developed British trade, increased British wealth ; and if, by an older law than that of nations, no two can have the best of any bargain, why, let us say again it was a far cry to West Africa, and Crœsus was not the man to make bad bargains.

As for his conscience, no man in those days carried one south of the Straits. If he were successful, he picked it up again on the journey north ; if a failure, then the evil was buried in the same oblivion as his bones, and another conscience left derelict—but that is another story ; and Crœsus had been successful.

When the critics came to particulars they were cautious ; wealth and a West-African temper do not submit lightly to philippics.

All this is introductory, that you may know the man, and how aptly he proved that men will praise you when you do well by yourself ; but as a matter of fact the point at which we meet him is exactly that at which he retires to seclusion, and for all practical purposes ceases to be a member of the pleasantest club in London.

An exciting debate was in progress. The Government of the day had disclosed by mis-

adventure a slave circular more than usually subversive of the average Briton's notions of universal emancipation. The Opposition patriots, trusting to official reserve to hide their own efforts in a like direction, were smitten with horror, and promptly moved a vote of censure. Party lines were for the moment trampled out of sight, and it was in a House tremulous with anticipation that Crœsus rose to speak.

As an old West-African, the only man there, perhaps, who knew the thing whereof all talked, he strode into an unusual importance. The electric influence of the occasion touched him ; and in the face of the wrath and scorn which possessed him, the torrent of invective and lurid pictures of crime, torment, and degradation which he poured out, the excitement calmed to the peace which lies in the heart of the tornado.

Suddenly the passionate declamation broke into a hoarse gasp, rising into the shrill inhalation of a choked breath ; turning round and round in his place he beat at the air feebly with both hands and collapsed in a huddled heap upon the floor. Crœsus had saved the Government.

It was a corpse, rather than a man, that two hours later was carried in at the wide hall-doors of the big house where Crœsus

had lived alone. From the eyes down he was dead ; but the brain still lived ; and the pathetic agony of a dying beast still looked out from under the grey brows. He could think ; a little dazed perhaps ; but the power of thought was active enough to be a torment.

A moment's pause in the hall ; the hissing whispers of ill-trained voices shrill with excitement ; then noiselessly up the broad stairway ; and, as the little procession paused at the turn of the landing, a grim fancy flushed his brain that when next he passed that way his bearers would have no such easy burden, for Croesus was six feet two, if an inch, and a lead coffin with an outer shell of oaken planks weighs heavy. Inert like a log, his weight of silence was an added stillness to the solemn quiet of the big room, gloomy in the shadows of a single gas-light. Through the house rolled the half muffled notes of inquiry and answer, and by screwing his eyes round Croesus could see by the door the outlines of a watcher. At intervals a shadow stole into the room, and a strange face bent down and looked into his eyes, and a hand was passed across his forehead, and then the shadow slipped away as noiselessly as it had come.

Presently there was a louder murmur of voices, and one, two, three shadows entered and lights leaped up round the room. He had

not known how cold he was until a warm hand was laid above his heart, then an unshivering chill crept down to his feet. It seemed as if he himself were touching himself, and the unresponsive iciness of the dead shot through him. Again a peering into the troubled eyes, a touch upon the wrist, and, if nature had not been dried at its fount, Crœsus would have wept to see the hand fall inertly from the fingers which had held it.

It was a keen kindly face that had looked into his, a specialist no doubt, called to lift the responsibility from the younger practitioner, a form almost necessary at times, but in this case empty and utterly useless. Crœsus was dead already, all but the horror of it; and he knew it.

The lights were turned down, the shadows passed the doorway, and life and the world were shut out for ever.

For the first time in his life Crœsus Junior did not curse an interruption at supper; no, not even though the festivity was shared by Mademoiselle Rueuse (*née* Polly Marks of Shoreditch), *première danseuse* of the Frivolity. That he should grumble was only natural. 'Selfish old beggar; couldn't he have knocked himself out some other night?' then, optimistically and with a touch of philosophy, 'Never mind, Poll, old

girl ; if things go right we'll make up for it by and by ; and it's only once in a fellow's lifetime, ye know, so there's no use in growling,' and Crœsus Junior went to comfort his father.

Under their white coverlid, in the thick of the flickering shadows, lay the mortal remains of Crœsus, M.P. His soul, or as much of it as he had not strangled, driven to his brain looked out fearfully into the black masses and solid patches of gloom which girdled him round.

In every one a memory gnashed and gibbered upon him. The devils his strong will had chained these many years were unloosed, and now, in his hour of weakness, they turned upon him and tore him.

Not much need to ask what they were. It was a far cry from West Africa ; but the wails of humanity sold to slavery, degradation, and death,—the agony of suffering in flesh and soul, —the curses and the shrieks of victims driven to worse than destruction, can bridge the distance, and the room was full of the turmoil of their howls.

To have stopped his ears, to have ground his teeth, to have moaned in the inexpressible horror of his torment, and to be impotent ! He closed his eyes and they came the nearer,

gaping and frothing at him as they crowded into his very brain, until in desperation he turned upon them with open eyes and faced them; and in the midst of his Walpurgis dream his son came in.

So actual and clamorous were the cries that Crœsus turned his piteous eyes on his son with a new terror in them, lest he, too, should hear the truth.

Crœsus Junior's first act was to turn the lights to their full; and it was with a conscious slackening of the tension straining in his brain that the sick man saw the glare leap out and the shadows melt away.

Evidently the worst—or the best—was known; for there were no questionings, no tenderness and solicitude, but only a calm indifference which almost ignored the lump of waste humanity stretched on the bed. With none of the cautious care of a sickroom, Crœsus the younger wheeled an arm-chair to his father's side, placing it so that he faced him, but with all the light behind. Then he lit a cigarette, and for full five minutes sat smoking, staring down into the rigid face, and trying to fix the restless eyes, which, after the first pathetic glance, persistently evaded his. Then he leaned forward with his elbow on the bed.

‘Not deaf, I suppose? No; the start in the eyes tells me that; so we can talk, or rather I will do the talking and you will listen; a reversal of the natural order, perhaps, but you have had your innings, and now it’s my turn. Twelve to fifteen hours, old Pills tells me.

‘What, you didn’t know the time was so short? Score one to me then for the news; the total will be bigger before we’ve done. Twelve to fifteen hours, and then—Hell? No, no, my father; Hell now, and that’s why I’ve come.

‘Keep your scorn to yourself; if I am a contemptible brute, who made me so? You—you—you. You who crushed my mother’s spirit, and killed her by the slow torment of petty cruelty and neglect. You who drove Mary to despair because you could not break her will; who thrust her out of your house for a lying rumour, and left her to starve and sink through desperation into unutterable infamy; you who stamped out every light of love that might have been in our hearts, and lit instead the fires of hate and wrath—you—you—father, damn you—you! So eat the fruit of your labours.

‘These fifteen years I have loathed you and been silent, for you were a masterful man and held us in terror of your rage; and then when

childhood passed, the cunning of policy held me dumb—I had no mind to die in the gutter and so lose all, for the luxury of a few hot truths.

‘Sordid? mean? Bah, I have played my cards and won, and now with the stakes in hand can take my revenge scatheless.’

Then flinging the blackened cigarette into a corner he fell back into the chair, his eyes feeding greedily on the agony of the other’s face.

Presently the hour of midnight rolled like a passing bell through the conscious oppressive silence. ‘Fourteen hours,’ he said. ‘You never taught me much Scripture, but I do remember there once was one who went to his own place. Fourteen hours? No, fourteen are too many, twelve are enough. Noon, or sooner, will end it. A handkerchief over the nostrils and the memory of a good deed to stay by me as long as I live.

‘Curious, isn’t it, twenty-four hours hence and I would shiver to sit with you. The revolt of nature you know; but now by these eyes of yours, and by the curse that is in them you are a living man for all your silence, and so the hours pass well enough. Still, I think a drink would help their flight. Suppose we share a bottle of champagne? Don’t care

father ; five hours—then mother and Mary and I will come and say good-bye—damn you.'

Then upon Crœsus fell an evil nightmare, hauntings of crime, greed, and lust, impotent tempests of wrath and hate, fierce despair, dumb agony of terror, and through them all the flitting interchange of face and figure ; then silence, and across the silence the heavy stroke of noon.

'A drop or two of brandy,' said Crœsus Junior. 'So—that is better—a greater sense of strength ; now this.'

He dipped a handkerchief in water, then wrung it out so that the splash fell noisily back into the basin. 'A drop to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this—— No, not a drop, not one.'

As he slowly walked to the bed he folded the linen across once, 'That's for mother ; twice, that's for Mary, curse you ; three times, that's for me.'

'We regret,' said *The Times*, 'that the illness which struck down Mr. Crœsus while addressing the House of Commons on Tuesday last, has proved fatal. If not a statesman in the fullest sense of the word, the deceased gentleman rose high above the level of the party politician, and by his integrity and unfailing geniality endeared himself to every section of

thought represented in the House. In the nobler world of charity he will be grievously missed ; and yet it may be truly said that none fully knew the breadth of his large-hearted generosity.'

'Polly, my girl,' said Croesus, junior no longer, 'did you ever read such lies ?'

'May I ask,' I said, as It gathered Itself together to evaporate, 'was the young man hanged ?'

'Ah, sir,' It answered, 'you are too exuberant in your desires ; wait till he has killed somebody worth the hanging him for.'

But somehow it occurred to me that it would have been better to have anticipated this.

When I went into the garden next morning, David, with his back arched like a cat in a passion, was making holes in the newly dug ground, and dropping some green stuff into the black cavities.

'Good morning, David,' I said, 'grand weather for planting your cabbages.'

He straightened himself and snickered in that superior way which is for all the world like a tweak of your moral nose.

'Hech, hech. Did ever man hear the like ? Thae's leeks.'

'Well, leeks then; but that's no reason why you shouldn't fill the holes up.'

'Sir,' he said solemnly, 'I grant ye you're awfu' knowledgeable wi' ghaists, but when it comes to the seerious things o' life I'm juist surprised at your eegnorance. A leek an' a man are awfu' like ane anither. If ye want him strong ye maun gie him air. The pheelosophy o' it is juist this—'

'Oh, bother your philosophy,' I exclaimed, 'your talk is arrant nonsense.'

'Ech, ech,' he went on imperturbably. 'See hoo deesappointment soors a man. I'll wager ye couldna catch Its face last nicht, an' sae ye scold an' rave at me the morn as if the blame was mine.'

The shrewd old fellow had put his finger on the truth. Drag-net my brain as I would, I could not bring to the surface a single suggestion of Its face. The dress had been the conventional garb of the night before, and had remained unvaried throughout the evening; but there memory failed, and the rest was an unsuggestive blank.

My face must have been as blank as my memory, for David continued, 'It's maist past belief; an' ye werena fu' neither. Nae man could be fu' on sic like stuff as yon soor clairet. It wad turn the stomach o' a heathen, an'

gin ye had been fu', its twa heids ye'd hae seen, an' no name. It's a waefu' thing to hae a' the penalties o' bein' drunk an' name o' the sateesfaction.

' Maybe ye can mak' pictures a bit? Na —well, ye can write? ay—that's a maircy. Tak' a pencil an' write doon as Its discoursin' —an awfu' habit It has o' discoursin'—a nose noo, an' a chin again, roond or lang in the chaps; beelious-like or ruddy, as was auld David; him I telt ye aboot ae time. Ye couldna smuggle in ane o' thea fotygraph things ye pit inside your waistcoat an' pu' a string an' it gangs click? Na, it wadna be ceevil, an' ceevility's a gran' thing when ye dinna ken but the tither folk has the langer airm and harder fist. I've aye foond it sae mysel'. I'll tell ye, sir, pit on a clean shift the nicht, ane wi' lang bands till the wrists, an' hae a wee bit pencil an' juist be takin' notes like yon chiel o' Bobby Burns's. Ech! but yon's Joan callin' me; bide ye here a wee, for when Joan gars her tongue clack it's warth the listnin' tae. She's no like maist weemen, aye blatherin', blatherin'. Bide ye here, sir, bide ye here, I'm no dune yet.'

Ten minutes later he came back with his eyes twinkling and a humorous twist to the mouth.



‘Yon paircel post’s a gran’ institution ; but for it I’m thinkin’ ye’d a’ had naethin’ for denner but yarbs, like Naybeechudnazzar ; noo there’s eyesters come—twa dizzen, an’ a saddle o’ mutton—the only richt saddle for a Christian man ; an’ a wee bit bird ; braw things, every one o’ them, an’ well warth the saxpenny stamps, a’ but thaе eyester shells—why didna ye get the beasties doon in a bladder ?’

‘Because there’s too much blather already,’ I answered weakly ; and as I fled I heard him say—

‘Eh me, hearken at that noo, an’ a body juist usin’ the gift o’ speech the Lord gave him.’

That night, and for several nights, my moan was Mariana’s,

It cometh not, she said,

and I was seriously thinking of writing to my lawyer to ask whether or not that action for false warranty of a ghost would lie against the agent. What deterred me was the fear that It would appear in the witness box, and indignantly swear that It was not, and never had been a ghost ; and I would be non-suited, with costs.

Cigars and pipes went from me, and I was reduced to the melancholy straits of smoking cigarettes ; when one night, as I lit my fourth,

Its placid voice began, 'How much more interesting is your average man than those abrupt departures from level mediocrity which you call either genius or imbecility. Rightly viewed he is the perfection of humanity, the proper blending of spirit and clay. Sufficient of this world, and with the promise of the next, rather than those others where the one element or the other has wrested the balance of power and forced a predominance.'

I confess I was staggered by the suddenness of the remark and its utter irrelevancy to my thought, so I did what most of you would have done in like circumstances, gasped and stammered something not very coherent.

'Ah,' It said, 'that's not what you have taught yourself, is it? Yet, consider, on the whole your genius and your imbecile do but little for the general good of the world. It is your solid average man who makes history, though your genius may write it. It is he who, whether butcher, baker, poet, or preacher, really sees and understands the needs of the other nine hundred and ninety-eight. The thousandth is your genius or your imbecile.'

'Your genius or your imbecile talks most, I grant, and so is most in men's mouths; but the truth is, the average man is nearer to their hearts when he gets a hearing. You see I

have been living with an average poet lately, and have taken a fancy to him.

‘Presently I will tell you a little story of the man who made verses, one who was out of the average; but this is quite a common man; he would not call himself a poet at all, but now and then he finds verse the fittest way to express his thought, and then he uses verse; says it is terse, crisp, and not discursive, as I am in prose. For the rest, he is a hard worker, not in prose or verse, but in the world’s business; and is an average man.

‘He mixes with men, and being no demigod, but simple clay in the forms of muscle and brain like themselves, he knows their fears, hopes, and passions. His standard of man’s greatness is a possible one, and, therefore, to be chosen rather than that set up by the loftier spirit which walks with its head in the stars, and in callous ignorance tramples on the smaller lives of this poor necessary earth.

‘His verse is not always of the best. A critic would find grievous fault, and the lines would not fit themselves to music. Here is one set of verses on THEOLOGY.’

Carve us out, cried the mob, what is new;
We weary of stone and of wood;
And the gods that held our worship are few,
And no longer are good.

The calm of the pure, cold face,
And the lofty look in the eyes,
That sees, and withers, our soul's disgrace
Through the life of our lies,

Must cease, and their gods have an end ;
For we cannot abide the rebuke
In the wrath and the pitiless scorn, that descend
On our sin, in their look.

We sin, and we bring to the fire
A sacrifice, to appease
The wrath of the gods for our soul's desire ;
And sin on at our ease.

But our spirits are stirred to repent,
And we cannot sin, as we should
If the cold stern eyes of the gods were not bent
From the marble and wood.

And they, since they have their meed
Of incense and offerings slain,
No longer should, as they do, have need
To look wroth on our stain.

So the sculptor took clay, and o'erlaid
The crumbling clods with his gold,
And fashioned, and shaped, till his hands had made
A form like the gods of old.

But the scorn was gone from its eyes,
And the wrath from the careless smile ;
And each knew that his god was the god of lies
And of all things vile.

So they sinned, and they sacrificed
That pardon might enter in ;
And they turned from their altar fires to keep tryst
Once again with their sin.

For they said, We have peace at the last,
And terrors no longer start :
For the days of chiding and wrath are past
And our god is our heart.

‘In other words,’ I said, a little hotly, ‘this versifier of yours considers average men—he being one—to be a pack of hypocrites?’

‘Not so,’ It answered placidly; ‘but he has observed a drift of preference that chooses form rather than faith. A desire to pay spurious coin into the spiritual exchequer. You, of course, are exempt from such a weakness.’

‘On the whole,’ I answered, ‘I think I prefer verse which tells its own story, and needs no commentator.’

‘Then if what I quoted was too obscure in its meaning perhaps this will please you better —“THE QUEEN’S CARTOUCHE.”’

Queen Amendsee, belovéd of the gods !
The glances of her eyes were like the rods
Wherewith great Pasht smote evil to the earth.
The seven spheres were pregnant at her birth,
And riches, wisdom, peace, discretion, love,
Joy, purity, descended from above :
While all the gracious powers of earth combined
To mould her form as matchless as her mind.
She lived, earth bloomed ; she died, and spring was fain
To grope its way to winter back again.
Gods and their handiwork with one accord
Went mourning with the mourning King her lord.

So reads the world ! To him who will unfold
These webs of spicy cerements which veil
My last poor shred of life, to him is told,
Writ deep upon my throat, another tale.

I was a Queen, but was a woman first :
There lies my story. What to me was power,
The solemn, sombre gorgeousness which burst
On unaccustomed eyes that dismal hour

When Pharaoh saw, and wooed me to his throne,
Forcing me thither, though my heart the while
Was starving for my love, my very own,
And loathed the cold, contemptuous Lord of Nile ?

She is a Queen, he said, she will forget ;
And Pharaoh wills it so, it is enough.
A fool of adulation, thus to set
A Pharaoh's word and so much tinsel stuff

Against a woman's love. The tears were dried,
Complaisance smiled, and looked him in the eyes
With eyes that looked devotion, eyes that lied ;
And lips spake words of love, and lips spake lies.

And Pharaoh was content : the Queen forgets ;
The sun outshines the feebler light that shone :
Nor dreamed that through a canker of regrets
The Queen might smile, the woman still love on.

Then came a day I lay upon his breast,
And put in careless words a studied thought :
There was a man, a sculptor, who was blest
With subtle skill in all the work he wrought,

Will Pharaoh send him hither as a boon
To carve my Pharaoh's image ? Pharaoh said,
Sculptors enough ; not him : this day at noon
He caught my chariot reins ; the dog is dead.

What need for stone, my Queen, while flesh and blood
Are tingling ripe with life? when these are weak
The marble if you will—and poured a flood
Of kisses on my mouth ere I could speak.

A jewelled toy hung glinting from my side;
I heaved it up, and where my head had lain
Thrust hard the dagger. Then had Pharaoh died
But that he gripped my throat with might and main,

And holding me at arm's length, watched the lips
His lips had kissed a moment since, grow stark.
My life slipped from me, waveringly, as slips
A stormy day, and passed into the dark.

May Amendsee the King's belovéd rest
As calmly as she slept on Pharaoh's breast;
But morning, noontide, gathering shades, and night,
Must weep their fill that she is reft from light.

'If you want the modern application,' It went on, 'you will find it in any obituary notice, be it of peer, poet, or plutocrat.

'But I see you are weary of my average verse-maker: here, then, is the story I promised you—"THE MISSING INSPIRATION."'

The public never found it out. The mistake was discovered by the Inspector-General of Talent when making up his annual account of unused stores. Or rather, it was when he came to compile his report for presentation to the authorities that he found out there had

been an error somewhere ; for there were at least two inspirations improperly accounted for.

Of course there was the usual average which produced quite inadequate results, being almost flat failures. But they had all at least reached their destination, and been used for the purposes for which they had been issued, therefore with them no fault could be found. But with these two there was plainly a mistake.

The entries in the 'Inspirations outward' book were perfectly regular, and the persons to whom they had been despatched accurately defined, being well known as former consignees, but the returns were out of order. An absolute blank in the one case, and in the other a quite improper destination had been reached. Had men been in the habit of giving obedience, or indeed paying any attention whatsoever to inspired utterances, the consequences might have been terrible ; as it was, fortunately no harm was done. In the old days of faith, revolution and bloodshed would have followed such an error. The overturning of constitutions, the destruction of armies, the fiery sacrifice of faith for the glory of God, all these had been consequent on a misdirected inspiration in the olden time, but not now in these days of decayed and cautious enthusiasm.

In truth, but that it was a good old whole-

some custom, and also a matter of business routine, placing the necessary responsibility on man, the distributing of annual inspirations might have been dispensed with. But the authorities said, 'No! who knows but that faith may yet recover strength, and the simple trust of the world's children grow in the hearts anew?' But of this there was no sign.

The question then was one of accounts, not consequences; which made it all the more serious. For consequences can always be explained away at the cost of an inferior official, but the deficit of twopence halfpenny in a balance-sheet is a different affair, involving the whole department in turmoil and excitement. For the authorities invariably insisted upon a full explanation of every item of expenditure.

In the one case there was no deficit, only that the inspiration had reached the wrong person. In fact the envelopes, as it were, had been mixed, and then one had gone astray. Very naturally the lesser evil was inquired into first. This course has the double advantage of allowing a longer time for something to turn up, and also of permitting an official denial of the mistake, for it is well understood that no mistake is possible until the higher authorities find it all out, and set an inquiry afoot to sift the consequences. Not the origin, mind you,

that matters nothing, but the consequences so far as they affect the public's opinion of the department. The evidence to begin with was perfectly simple and clear. On a certain day these two inspirations had been correctly chosen, their selection having been made with the usual appropriate nicety, and duly despatched.

The one was directed to a great genius who was perfecting a machine for the Automatic Better Government of Nations. You put a plebiscite in the slot and the machine did the rest. Only one simple single addition was required, one final touch. The body of it was there ; it was a complete success in every particular ; the cogs fitted admirably one into the other, the wheels revolved smoothly and noiselessly ; each separate part was perfection, but it failed to work. And now, unfortunately, the inspiration which told the inventor that he was a fool for his pains had miscarried, and he was left to work out the design by the unaided instinct of his own brain.

Consequently there was an explosion which entirely removed him from his sphere of activity ; but, as the Inspector-General of Talent said, it did not really matter, as the catastrophe rather redounded to the credit of its author, for he was promptly accounted the greatest scientist of his age, and the most inspired of advanced thinkers. No such word as failure was ever

hinted at, and with the erection of a national memorial, depicting him as an angel of light tearing aside the veil from the dark secrets of nature, the public promptly forgot him. His part of the story is ended.

The second inspiration was intended for a poet. A new poet, or almost new, for he had not been writing more than twenty-five years, and already his work was beginning to compel thought.

A poet of no section, but of human nature in its universality. A poet who lashed the smooth vices of the rich and the curt brutality of the poor with the same strong hand. A poet who bowed his head before self-sacrifice in high places and tender brother-heartedness in rags. A poet who was not the toy idol of his widening circle, to be alternately worshipped beyond his merits and thrust neglected into a corner. No spasmodic Memnon of broken day-harmonies, answering only to the stray shafts of popular sunlight which smote him in the eyes. A poet, and when that is said, all is said.

To him, slowly and with reluctance, the people lent an unwilling ear ; grudging to listen because, being a prophet like every other poet, and in addition a truth-teller, which every prophet is not, he did not always prophesy smooth things, but told them harsh homely truths in

that plain fashion which grates so roughly on our delicate organisation of self. The hermit-crab, for instance, hates to be told he is a degenerate, worthless semiparasite, dependent upon another's cast-off abode for bare existence, since hitherto he had flattered himself on his ease, and called it adaptability. And just because, little by little, the poet's utterances compelled the people's respect, they patiently endured his scorn of their pleasant vices, and were even feebly stirred to follow that wider and nobler course to which his burning words impelled them. Stung into life, they waited the revelation of guidance ; and the prophet was dumb. The inspiration failed.

Suddenly, in the midst of his life work, the glowing consciousness of his mission died into ashes. The voice which thrilled the people's hearts, and set their aspirations vibrating to its own loftier pitch, faltered and grew faint. The music of triumph, progress, and exaltation broke and quavered, passing through a quick discord into silence. A dimness fell upon the swift instinctive insight, which had looked unerringly through all form and folly, however draped in tinsel ; beholding pure truth, naked and eternal.

The inspiration had fallen upon him, chilling his soul, throttling his powers, raising the devil of self-consciousness, self-distrust. What were

the people to him ? was he not after all a fool for his pains, wearing his life out for love of them who loved him not at all ? So he crushed down the promptings of his spirit and cramped them into silence, breaking his heart with self-reproach at his failure. For now it seemed to him that his life had been a pitiable mistake ; he had achieved nothing, gained nothing, except at the last the knowledge of his folly. With unutterable shame he shrunk into seclusion, seeking only that the wasted life and unaccomplished aspirations might be forgotten.

To have dreamed high dreams and believed them truth ; to have deceived even his own soul with a faith in his mission ; and now to know it all a lie ! To have lived for the people, setting forth that he could regenerate, strengthen, and brighten their lives ; and all the while to be a fool for his pains ! Oh the fool, to live for the people, and think the people cared ! In six months' silence he was forgotten, and his memory only endured thus long because of the controversy between two learned men, who, in high-class reviews, debated the question of 'The Abrupt Determinations of Talent,' using the living poet to point the arguments. As for his anguish at having his decayed powers thus dissected before the public, the learned men considered that not at all.

So the inspiration was returned with the cancelling stamp upon it. It had been used, and so was duly accounted for in the Inspector-General's books, only it was plain, from the unusual fraying and fretting at the edges, that it had passed through a wrong circuit. But the public were quite content, thoroughly enjoying the anatomising of the failure of a greater man than themselves ; and so no harm was done.

Now the truth of the matter is, as has been said, the mistake was made at the time the inspirations were despatched. Not only were the addresses transposed, but one was so directed that the message completely lost its way. This was the one containing that gift of divine song which was to finally rouse the people, small and great, rich and poor, from their rounds of petty sordid self-seeking, and inspire them with something of the spirit of the master singer. This was the one wrongly addressed to the inventor who, had he received it, would have been a madman all his days thereafter, the message being too great for his heart and brain ; so that after all he had the better part.

A derelict upon earth, the poor waif wandered aimlessly, seeking some sympathetic soul to give it house room, but found none. Men rather looked askance at it, no one daring to take it to his bosom. Not that they knew its scope

or direction—that was concealed until it entered into the life—but it was an inspiration, and inspirations are kittle things to deal with.

In vain it lurked about the despatch box of a foreign minister; brilliant originality is dangerous, so the temptation was thrust aside. It hid itself in the brief of a hard-working plodding Q.C.; but there was no precedent for inspiration in Chancery law, so it was bundled out of court.

Then it said, Surely art lives by me, and by me grows greater, showing the soul of things to eyes that cannot see for themselves. So it haunted the studios, but in vain. Eyes looked at it wistfully enough, and hearts longed to dare be bold enough to seize it for their own. But their great master of the arts, the public, is a very Procrustes for devotion to scale, and likes its work measured to respectable mediocrity. So with a sigh the visitor was gently, but with firm decision, shut outside the door; and art returned, sorrowfully enough, to the remunerative conventional.

Wander where it would through the length and breadth of the city, failing to meet a company promoter, there was none bold enough to give the pariah a home.

Westward through the city a river laden with the commerce of many nations crept to the sea, battling with the tide for those last twenty miles

of its course which lay between the restless whirlpool of humanity and the unceasing fret of waters against the coast.

Outside the city a fringe of gardens climbed up a gentle slope, and then straggled into pastures towards the sea. Beyond, topping a steeper bluff, was a compact belt of pine and fir. Inland, the hills rose abruptly, passing quickly from fat meadowlands through scanty sheep pastures into a desert of broken stone, gorgeous at times with the glory of furze and bracken.

Midway between the hills and the sea, under the shelter of the pine bluff, lived a feckless body. So his neighbours called him; so his father and mother called him; and such, in the brief moments when he gave the matter a thought, he knew himself to be. Even the sheep scorned his pretences at caring for them, and all undisturbed broke such hedges as pleased them, while he fought the battles of the Gods with Homer, or wandered through the fields of Paradise by Dante's side: never through Purgatory, never into the still lower depths, but always with the interchanging glories of the angels.

A solitary lad, he yet had six or eight fast inseparable friends, with at least one dwelling ready to hand in his jacket pocket.

Two of them you know already, four others

were Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, and Keats, and they, being dear friends, had taught him all they knew, as they sometimes teach those who love them and are brothers of the same ichor. Through their ministry he found himself in tune with all things musical. In their light the soul of beauty which inhabits common things was revealed.

His heart leaped up in time to the thunders of the surge upon the rocks, to the whistle of a winter's storm through struggling pine-needles above the sheepfolds ; to the white passion of the stream, buffeting its way through opposition to peace ; to the treble of a child's voice singing amongst the corn-stalks ; to the autumn trill of the robin through the thinning leaves of the hedgerows. All woke music in him, but it was the music of Marsyas before Athena's breath touched his lips, for it died unsung in his dreamy brain and wordless exultant spirit. The beauty of all things flushed him like the sun, for he saw all things as God willed them and not as made by man, but the beauty sank into his own life and was hid.

And his neighbours and kinsfolk told him he was a poor feckless body ; which indeed he was.

It was a wild day in autumn when the hapless inspiration found him on the shore ; a day of rage and tempest, wind and cloud tearing

one another, the fierce battalions of the sky forming and reforming in endless warfare, with broken columns of rain stalking over the troubled waters scattering its white dust with their feet. The sea seething, bubbling, and crashing, tempest above linked by tempest to tempest below. A day of wide nostrils and deep breaths, with a fierce exaltation setting the heart a-gallop!

It was on the edge of the salt meadows, where the stiff wiry grass is drenched by the spray in winter time, just above the stretch of grinding stones and sand, that it came upon him.

He stood there all trembling with sympathy, facing the storm and drinking in its spirit with deep-chested draughts, when, of a sudden, the greater soul—which in most of us never leaps up until it leaps to meet, or flee from, the touch of death—sprang to life in him, as if he who was akin to the struggling elements was their master, and could wield their strength and harmonies as he chose. The dumb spirit which had been within him was loosed from its bondage, and from that time forward there fell upon him the joys and travail of creation. Marsyas had found the enchanted flute with the breath of the goddess fresh upon it.

For five weeks he lived in Paradise, a divinity shared his life; the gilded was gold,

pure gold—for five weeks. But his father and mother held the opinion that he was more feckless than ever, and so summoned a council of the neighbours, before which they laid the case. After much deliberation the united wisdom decided that strong measures must be taken ; so that evening they held an *auto-da-fe*, and, grimly in earnest, burnt his friends and companions, the playfellows of his thoughts —his books. The Inquisition, after its sitting, had removed to the place of execution, the dingy attic where the mighty dead had so often gathered together to hold communion with a kindred spirit ; and there on the hearth Shakespeare, Homer, and Keats shrivelled and curled in the agonies of the flame together with the rest ; the council of wisdom sternly approving while the skin blistered in the heat and the white flesh slowly blackened under the hungry creeping flame. As ignorance ever is, they were pitiless.

He had been out in the fields when judgment was passed, and only returned to see the last of his friends wither away to dust, his five weeks' labour of love adding fuel to the pyre, while the executioners stood stolidly round watching him burn. A glance to the empty shelves, and another to the blackened hearth, and there was no need to upbraid him with his

evil companionship. His face showed him stricken, for the light died out of his eyes, and his cheeks grew lined and white with the mortal pain. But he spoke no word, only shrunk into a chair and hid his face, shaking from head to foot the while.

Then, their wordy censure struck dumb, they turned and left the room, involuntarily stepping lightly as if in the presence of the dead or dying; all but his mother, and she, trembling and fondling his bowed head, stood crying behind his chair. That night he could write nothing, his brain was on fire, but it was the slow smouldering of burnt-out ashes with no play of flame.

By daybreak he was abroad among the fields, but his rejoicing had failed; to him the world was dead, and lay waiting the last sad dissolution of decay—its beauty, its living energy were lost. All that day, and the next, and the next, his powers lay dormant or dead, no striving, no spurring could rouse them. White, silent, and dispirited, he wandered restlessly from room to room, or lay numbed and stricken at the feet of the whispering pines.

Then he went down to the sea. The tide was on the flood turn, and under the lash of a strong westerly wind the waves were running into the bay high and white-crested.

Only five weeks, but time enough to have tasted life and to know death.

From the centre of the bay a narrow chain of rocks stretched out into the water, turned abruptly, parallel to the coast line, and ended in a broad ridge almost covered at high tide and sloping by ledges sheer to the sand and shingle. Down this causeway he picked a path, and following its angle slipped past the terminating boulder. There, on the topmost ledge, he paused, facing seawards.

Fifteen feet below the sea swelled up angrily, green and misty under the infiltration of disturbed sand, rising unbroken half-way up the rock, to be cast splashing back into the hollow preceding the next incoming wave. Beyond, the desolate confused tumult of waters reached unbroken to the horizon; above, the pale cloudless blue, the rare beauty of an early winter's perfect day.

But neither beauty nor fresh vigorous life stirred a chord within him. The harpstrings of delight were snapped and tangled; he only crept two ledges nearer to the sea, and crouching in an angled niche of rock, waited. The hungry beast of the deep seemed to scent its prey, for it leaped to meet him, gripping him to the knees, then sank back, frothing.

Ten minutes—fifteen minutes; and now it

leaped to his waist and swayed him as he stooped, receded, swelled up, fell, swelled up again, and the niche was empty, and the sea rolling an inert plaything up and down the rocks. The inspiration had died, and four days' burden of death were as many as he could bear.

But, as the Inspector-General of Talent said, it really was of no consequence, since the public knew nothing about it.

‘H’m,’ I said, when It ceased speaking, ‘of the two deviations from the direct line of average, this, I presume, was the imbecile?’

‘You have a most sympathetic insight,’ It replied, in a tone which I did not quite like. ‘But of all cheap criticism there is nothing cheaper than a cynical sneer; it suggests a barren exchequer.’ And before I had time to think out a crushing retort It had evaporated.

III

It was not until the next evening that the recollection flashed across me that as yet I had no clear idea of Its features. On the occasions of Its visits Its dress had from time to time varied, but the form had remained the same, except that during the story of the Missing

Inspiration It had grown, as it were, nebulous, and of uncertain outline. Of Its features my memory could retain no certain picture, and I therefore determined to devote the evening to such close observation as would make forgetfulness impossible. But the suddenness with which the smooth tones broke the silence startled away my purpose, and It was well launched in Its speech before the intention was recalled. Then an odd thing happened.

Up to that moment I had been keenly conscious of Its presence, though with the unstable consciousness of a dream which melts into oblivion at the awakening. Now that I looked at It with an alert purpose, the curves and outlines of which I had been so assured disappeared. The mass was there, the voice sped calmly on, but the identity was lost. It was Thackeray's caricature of Louis le Grand with Louis left out.

As I stared at the apparent bundle of clothes symmetrically piled against the back of the chair, the voice broke off, then began again.

'I think,' It said, 'I once told you that I was not curious about my friends. You allow me the title, do you not? But there are some things which show on the surface; and even if I would I cannot disguise from myself your purpose. If the object amuses you, decidedly

pursue it — heaven knows the amusements of life are few enough. But the sooner you recognise that human knowledge and experience have their clearly defined limits, the sooner your curiosity will be at rest. The failure to recognise the boundaries set by natural law has always been a weakness of you men. Take my case. You are conscious of my presence. You feel that the personality is not repugnant. To tell the sober truth, your subtle sub-consciousness has been pleased with it. But you are not satisfied, you must peer and pry; if needs be, and it were possible, you would flay, pierce, and dissect. That I tell you it will be to no purpose will not deter you. No, to the end of our association you will catch yourself tripping over failures, and to the end you will learn no more than you have learned to-night.

‘The truth is, you see nothing but what you imagine. These clothes’—and It stretched Its arms and straightened Itself in the chair—‘exist only in your thought. Imagine, if you can, that they do not exist, and they will fade away. That they have changed their shape goes for nothing. Your keen unconscious imagination clothed me in a garb suited to the changed environment of thought: that was all. It is I who am real—not they. That you will continue experimenting is a matter of course, and

on the whole is good. You remind me of Bryan Barry ; experimenting was at one time a weakness which he may now possibly regret. If you like I will tell you of one of his theories. If you want a name for the story we will just call it a " NOTE OF INTERROGATION. "

Dr. Bryan Barry was plainly thinking out a problem, or, more likely still, formulating a theory ; otherwise his short black briar-root would never have gone out for lack of suction, nor the long thick-bottomed tumbler of whisky and water remained neglected.

Even in the light of a summer sun the surgery at Glenbaragh is a dingy place. The orthodox sheets of perforated zinc blot out most of the brightness, and there is a general air of melancholy and depression suggestive of a speedy dissolution, which not even the three-cornered tear in the yellow blind can dispel. The atmosphere smells of premature decease tempered by iodoform, and even the flavour of strong tobacco is entirely insufficient to impart a sense of active humanity. But in the damp oppressive stillness of a thick November afternoon, the gloom reaches a tragic depth, to which a half-expanded gas jet gives a blue touch of the diabolical.

A turf fire smoked in the small grate, and

in front of it, hunched up in a deep arm-chair, sat Bryan Barry, turning over a child's skull with his restless fingers. You know the kind of thing it is, a pathetic hybrid between a cat and a monkey, which shows how true are the parallels of nature.

If he had been asked why, after fifteen years of qualified medical life, he still remained the dispensary doctor to an obscure parish in the south-west of Ireland, he would have answered that he had no ambition, and was content. His friends, or for the matter of that his enemies, if he had any, to the same question would have replied, Indolence and the curse of a hundred and fifty pounds a year; and there are times when your friends have a trick of being right.

As a student he had been an enthusiast. No drudgery was too dull, no labour too severe; and if there had been an occasional excursion into primrose ways, it was sturdily repented of, and the old love clung to with a renewed and stronger devotion. In all subjects he had reared himself head and shoulders above the men of his year, and when it fell to his turn to deliver the presidential address to the Association of Fourth Year Students, the general anticipation of original matter was not disappointed.

At that period the profession is shy of publicity, an amiable weakness which later on is thoroughly repented of; and the relationship between the Medical School and the Daily Press being occasionally strained, through personalities on the part of the latter, its aid was not invoked. But from the scraps and tags which have been handed down to duller generations, Bryan Barry must have quitted the solid, sober fields of recorded experience, and, scorning the limited horizon of accepted truth, have travelled far into the theoretic possibilities of medical science applied to certain conditions of nature.

For an hour there was not an undergraduate of them all but felt within him the throb and fire which hint creation.

What they were, these theories, is lost; but the passion of the man's belief left its stamp upon his fellows long after he had sunk into oblivion in the petty dispensary of Glenbaragh.

The history of his fifteen years in Glenbaragh is the history of waste, and belongs to the stock-in-trade of the moralist. Let it be, we would none of us like a too careful raking up of the ashes of the bygone. Sparks linger and flare up when least desired, or it may be that the fires have been less effectual than we believed,

and some fuel still remains. Let the dead past bury its dead ; the fifteen years had slipped from him and were forgotten.

There had still been a grey glare in the west when he reached the tiny cat-faced skull from the bone-cupboard in the corner of the room, and the shadows had grown and deadened into blackness, while he still sat turning it slowly in his hands, measuring its angles, its length, its width, with infinite thought and solicitude. Then he sunk into absolute stillness, the skull lying clasped in his lap ; and for five minutes the silence grew into the tiny babel of infinitesimal sound.

Men who live much alone—and women, too, for the matter of that—fall into the trick of arguing their points with themselves ; the sound clears the mist as thunder the air, and so it was with Bryan.

‘A miserable chance at the best ; and yet, why not more than a chance ? I proved it years ago on paper ; demonstrated not alone the possibility of success, but its certainty as an irrepressible truth. On the one hand a congenital idiot if it lives long enough for the soul period to be reached, which I doubt. An imbecile certainly, for the pressure must produce stagnation of the intellect, and finally atrophy. A human animal now, an animal to

the end. On that side I can see no hope, while on the other—by the Lord, the possibilities are infinite! A man of men! the frame of the wage-earner linked to the intellect of the metaphysician and the poet. Strength and thought—strength and thought—a leader and a creator to foresee, shape, and compel. Limits? limits! there are no limits, and the gift lies here!' And he shook his open hand in the air with a triumphant gesture.

Again he took up the skull, and held it critically between his eyes and the light of the gas, turning it this way and that with slow intent watchfulness. Then he went on again.

'Ordinarily the sutures run so and so; lateral here, and then again along the base thus. But if I cut the—— It's coming, oh, heart of my youth, that I thrust from me in the mill-track of common life—all the visions of the power of mind to drive nature to its best fulfilment whether it will or no—you are coming back, coming back, and the end of its triumph are in the hollow of my hand!'

From the shelf above the dusty cupboard which held his scanty library, a dingy bust through half a score of years had stared blankly at the window opposite, more grimy with the peat-reek of each recurring winter, and slowly settling into a moted sepulchre.

Laying down the skull beside the thick-bottomed tumbler, Bryan lifted down the plaster head, and for the first time in ten years dusted it. It was one of those phrenological model charts which may be bought in any second-hand shop for half-a-crown ; and whose weak chin and undecided mouth gave the bountiful lie to all the bravery and virtue rampant on the skull.

‘Curious,’ said he ; ‘Veneration black as my hat, while Benevolence shines up in its usual beastly aggressive way ; just like it, smiling and obvious, always sure to come to the front. I hate your benevolence,’ and he carefully smudged it over with the dust from Love of Approbation. ‘Now,’ he chuckled, ‘that’s much more natural.

‘Let me see, it must be like this, a sweep round by this angle and across here ; then two lateral cuts, all freeing the higher humanity. This again left solid strangles the evil. How near one lies against the other ; a slip and the devil might be loose.

‘I think,’ and here the briar was thrust into the blue gas jet, and sucked at till it flared like the core of a volcano—‘I think,’ and the thick-bottomed tumbler rose quickly, hung poised at a decreasing angle, and then clanked emptily upon its wooden stool—‘I think my duty is

clear. Only, as the dispensary is worth a hundred and fifty a year, I had better do my duty with caution. That means, I take it, have my own way against my better judgment and under force of necessity. Better judgment winks solemnly, and says, Bryan, run no risks, no games, Bryan. Necessity frowns down such frivolity, and says, Duty, Barry, duty.

‘Now, whom shall I get to play mother to my inventions? The squire? Best not; if things went wrong and two men in a hole resulted, I would lose my shooting, and just now the cock are enough to fire the blood of a corpse. Besides he has thirteen dozen of that claret left; he told me so the last time we climbed out of the ditch the other side of Whelan’s bull-finck; and it would be a cardinal sin to lose my share of it. The parson? He’s a good sort the parson, and would back up science to the very gates of Hades, so he won’t do. Why would he go playing deputy at Sullivan’s hanging? these amateurs have no discretion—wasting his reputation on a half-dead man; the coroner would say it was a put-up job, a new departure in vivisection or something of that sort. That comes of making attorneys coroners; they think they must play not only law but morality too; an attorney, mind you! The priest? That’s the man for

me ; level-headed and as autocratic as the Muscovite himself ; and the little beast's baptised, so that accidents won't count. Father Maurice ; who shall say nay if Father Maurice says yea ? Not Mrs. Murphy, I'll swear ; and Father Maurice shall say yea or have an idiot on his conscience, though, begad, there'd be nothing new in that ; he must have many a one on it as it is, for it's a large parish.'

Then he took to again handling the skull, but this time vigorously and through clouds of smoke, like one whose mind was made up upon the broad principle, but who was still working out the details, which he did, laying the bone alongside the casting, and carefully marking it with lines of accurate length.

Glenbaragh, though the only pretence at a village for many a mile in any direction, is but a hamlet at the best—a group of white-washed mud cottages, snugly thatched ; whose half-dozen of dejected shops stand empty and fly-blown, except upon such days when the periodic fairs draw in the cottiers and small farmers from the surrounding hills. To its recesses the weight of outer public opinion never reached, and so Glenbaragh was its own universe.

Next morning was a Friday fast and Father Maurice was chipping his third egg when Bryan Barry, with all the welcome familiarity of old

friendship, walked in unannounced, swinging the inevitable black bag in his left hand.

I wish some one would write the stories told by a doctor's black bag ; not the entire truth, but just as much as weak nature will stand. What depths of tragedy and pathos would they not touch, and what tales of failure tricked out to ape success ! For, alas that it should be so, doctors are but human after all, though they have surer methods of hiding their failures than most men.

'The Widow Murphy's in luck, that I've found you, Father,' said he after the first greetings ; 'and as you're about finished, I think we had better lose no time.'

It was one of Father Maurice's foibles never to be told news of his parishioners ; so he only answered quietly, as he drove the spoon through the bottom of the shell for luck, 'You're right, doctor, and we'll go up at once, for she's a decent woman if ever there was one.' Then, like the shrewd fox that he was, 'You can tell me the details on the way.' Whereat Bryan smiled.

Leaving the one straggling street of the village the road wound uphill, with a wild stretch of bog and rounded grey boulders on the one hand, ending in a sharp saddle-back hill, bleak and clear against the sky, and on the other a dense belt of pines, behind which the

hoarse voice of the Atlantic roared unceasingly. Here and there through the hills were tiny patches of greener herbage pathetically small ; where years of incessant labour had wrested from nature the bare possibilities of a miserable existence. In each of these a dull grey cabin, destitute alike of window or chimney, reared itself. Here, in the grinding wretchedness of unspeakable poverty, lives as pure as ever lived in the hand of God, blossomed, faded, and withered back to their dust ; facing from cradle to grave the desperate horrors of starvation, held indeed at bay, but with its cold breath ever in the face. One of these cabins was the object-point of the doctor and Father Maurice.

‘It’s life or death,’ said Barry, ‘or, to you, Father Maurice, it’s worse : it’s the making or marring of a soul, and the possibility lies in your hands. As for me, as the woman’s doctor, it’s my duty to point out the right course ; but it’s a risk—oh yes—it’s a risk.’

‘Then why take it?’ said Father Maurice sharply ; ‘it’s no business of ours to play with other folk’s brains.’

‘Brains,’ echoed Bryan Barry. ‘Listen to me. You’re a gardener, I know, like every kindly-minded man ; what happens if you take a plant that needs the possibilities of luxuriant development, and instead cramp its root action

so that it cannot feed? Or take it that it does feed; absorbs the last particle of available nourishment, and impelled by hunger pushes out, as nature alone can push, against the walls that crush it. What follows?

‘Stagnation and death,’ said the priest.

‘Stagnation and death,’ repeated the doctor, ‘the last word has been said. The brains are there unless you stop their growth; and though psychology is a height beyond the scope of my inquiries, yet, tell me, where does the soul come in if the baptised child be a congenital idiot by grace of your reverence? What is the worst, failure and death? Is that the worst, or is not a pauper imbecile dragging out its melancholy waste of years a heavier sorrow? What is the best?—who knows, for who can tell what germ of creative power, what immeasured height of illuminating intellect may not lie behind success?’

‘How can I tell what is worst?’ answered Father Maurice moodily.

They had left the main road, and were walking up the narrow boreen leading to the Widow Murphy’s hovel, the wiry bog-grass and dreary waste of savage slope upon either side, and as they reached the yard facing the door, Father Maurice laid his hand on the doctor’s shoulder.

‘Barry,’ he said, ‘your philanthropy is

refreshing, and I am always doubtful of your profession when it becomes benevolent. I am a little afraid of your philanthropy. Is there anything behind it all? for you are like the sea washing in there past Innishtrull—very bright and free and open; but the depths are out of sight, and the drift of the currents are hard to trace. I'm the woman's priest, and your path and mine are not always the same. Is there anything behind all this?

Bryan swung round in the sunlight. 'Nothing but a doctor's struggle with disease and death. Don't you stamp out a moral curse? why not I a physical? What would be behind it?'

'How should I know?' answered the other; 'on you be the issue.'

The cabin differed in nothing but petty details from its fellows of the hillside. Without chimney and windowless, the smoke from the peat fire in the corner curled out through a hole in the angle of the roof, first forming a thick haze which filled the entire upper half of the cottage. Upon the rough mud floor stood a spotlessly clean deal table with wedges thrust under one leg to counteract the inequalities; three chairs, chipped and splintered, but free from speck or stain, completed the tale of luxuries. In one corner was rolled the straw mattress forming the bed, and over it was folded the

coarse rug which constituted its only covering. Against the wall was placed a small dresser holding a few cracked plates; and above the fire, to one side, hung two or three pots and tins whose shining surface sent a feeble glimmer into the vapour.

The Widow Murphy, a once comely woman of about thirty, but with the story of half a century of poverty and distress written in the scores upon her face, threw open the door as the priest and Bryan Barry turned to the house.

‘God save ye, yer reverence. God save ye, doctor. Is it little Mickey ye’re been plased to come about? Sure he’s gettin’ on fine, doctor; I do be thinkin’ he’s takin’ notice, and him only eight months old. Yis, yer reverence, some childer do take notice airlier, but Mickey was wakely, ye see, and me trouble when Paddy was took told agin’ him in the milk. Fretful, doctor? sure he’s the quietest boy; he just lies and stares before him wise-like, and I think it’s growin’ on him, glory be to God, for it’s the aisier nursin’. Sleep is it, yer reverence? Oh, ye may say that, then, and nothin’ bothers him; not the glower of the turf, nor the open door there, nor nothin’, but he’s as aisy and contint as a kitten.’

‘Bring him out to the light till we see him,’ said Bryan. ‘Um, bigger; yes, bigger; and

solemn as an owl. Now, Mrs. Murphy, have you got a yard of flannel, do you think? No! Well, run across to Mrs. O'Brien beyond and borrow some, his reverence will nurse Mickey till ye come back; more's the pity he can have none of his own.'

When talking with his country patients the doctor fell almost insensibly into something of their tricks of speech; but as Mrs. Murphy went on her errand, he turned to Father Maurice and said:

'Now, you understand. The brain is being cramped already by this complete ossification of the skull, which crushes and curbs in the effort at growth. The sutures which should permit development have knit, and the bone of the skull is the bone of a man, compressing and stifling into imbecility the efforts of nature. What were your words, stagnation and death? Now, if I cut here and here, just deep enough to give the expansion of the brain power to act, the imbecile becomes intellectual; the animal, human; the child, a man.'

From the mud wall where he sat Father Maurice looked up into the other's eyes; his kindly face the battle-ground of tumult and difficulty; and as he looked the fire died out of the eyes looking down into his.

'As you will, Father; another idiot in the

parish more or less won't count ; they're common enough.' Then, as there was a rattle of stones in the boreen, ' Not got the flannel, Mrs. Murphy ? Well, we'll go without it, like Bryan O'Linn and his sheepskins.'

Father Maurice rose up from his place on the wall, the solemn, ancient-looking, grey-eyed bairn still in his arms. ' Bridget,' he said sharply as though bracing himself and her both up to a final decision, ' the boy ? '

At the tone the mother's face changed pitifully. ' Yis, yer reverence, sure I know,' and she took her child to her bosom and fondled it hungrily with her lips. ' Oh me lamb, core of me heart, me blood is cold through the fear for ye. What is it to be, yer reverence ? sure the doctor has talked to me, and me heart's broke in the terror for him ; he does be lyin' there so strange, wid the wise old look in his eyes, as if he wasn't of this world at all. Oh, me boy, me boy, what did God Almighty send ye for at all, at all, if ye wasn't to comfort the heart of the widow, and let the mother see the love shinin' back from yer eyes ? '

The wail of the mother froze the vacillation of the priest.

' Hush, woman,' he cried, almost harshly, so sharp pitched was the voice ; ' He sent him to be a man for Himself.'

‘You are sure?’ said the priest, as they turned down the boreen an hour later, ‘you are sure?’ and he caught Barry half-imploringly by the sleeve. ‘It came upon me, as I heard the soft splinter of the bone, that we were playing at God Almighty; and as with Him, so with us, it must be heaven or hell, triumph or curse—no middle course, and I have shivered ever since, for some men are devils. You are sure, sure?’

The other was like a man in a dream, his mind oblivious to the bodily environment. Then he said, ‘Oh for twenty-five years to see this thing. A king of men, every faculty for good fostered, every germ of evil crushed. God give me life till then!’

But the priest insisted again, ‘Are you sure, are you sure?’

For a moment the doctor answered him never a word. Then he said, ‘Heaven or hell—which? for my hand shook at the last.’

‘And the experiment, how did it result?’

‘That,’ It said gravely, ‘is the question which I have been asking myself for years. Some of these days I must look up Bryan Barry and find out.’

After all a ghost can give but the shadow of

companionship, especially if it has business abroad in the world twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four. So I had not been very long a resident in Gobelin Grange when I applied to David for information as to my neighbours.

‘What sort of fellow is the parson, David? and whereabouts does he live?’

‘Dinna speer at me aboot nae parsons,’ David answered wrathfully; ‘a huntin’-breeched, leather-legged, scarlet-coated birkie. Aince a week, come Sawbaths, is a’ we see o’ him roond here, and maybe mair nor eneuch tae. When eleevin’ o’clock strikes, they jingle-jangle yon crackit bell in yon crackit steeple for a lang hauf-oor, and then on the bang o’ the hauf-past my gentleman comes tarin’ up in his dogcairt, wi’ his horse streamin’ frae a ten mile gallop in thrutty meenits, an’ afore ye weel ken where ye are he’s fox-huntin’ through the sarvice, takin’ it in loups and boonds, till your head fairly swims. Then, as the clairk is lockin’ his jaws frae the last A-amen, his surplice is this way, an’ his harsock or carsock, or the guidness kens what, flees that, an’ afore ye could cry, “Hark forrad,” he’s poundin’ doon the road, an’ it’s guid-bye for anither seeven days, an’ ower short a time tae.

‘And then, ye ken, a’m a Presbyterian, and ane o’ the real auld licht. The last glimmer, I

thocht, till yon man—ye ken wha I mean—set the haill o' Scotland flarin' frae Kirriemuir to Drumtochty.'

After that I drew a long breath. 'Well, then, the doctor?'

David sniggered. 'Na, na, sir! ye'd best leave the doctor tae himsel'. Ye canna steal a man's collops an' be freends wi' him, it's no in natur'. Wi' his sweltherin's fees, tae. Na, na, nae doctor.'

'Let me see; who is there left? The squire?'

'Oh, the squire is it? Weel, then, I'm thinkin' ye an' the squire wad mak' bane and flesh. Ye ken, sir, I'm no gaun tae creeticise, I ken my station ower weel for that. But here's his picter. He'll gie wi' ae hand an' tak' wi' the tither. He'll lead ye on to blether, an' then pit the law on ye for no haudin' your tongue. Ye canna tell when ye please him and when ye dinna; ye never find him sayin' tae an auld servant wha has served, the hoose a score o' years, Tak' a holiday, Tammas, or Jeems, or wha ye will, an' there's a twa sovereigns for your pleasure. Na, na, it's Tammas, saxpence off your wage for that; Tammas, saxpence off your wage for this; an' Tammas, haud your tongue for a bletherin' loon; an' Tammas a' the time as quite an' canny a man as the

A'mighty ever sent into the warld to mak' it bright. That's the squire.'

'H'm,' said I, 'I'm rather glad you did not criticise him, David, you might have said something personal. Where does he live?'

'Weel noo,' said David thoughtfully, 'that's a question, an' to think I haena got an answer for ye. Ye'd best speer at Joan; she kens. And he sent Joan to me.'

'Is it squire, sir?' asked Joan. 'Sakes me, why, you're squire.'

And so I had squire to dinner, but no one else.

'If the agent spoke the truth,' I said to It that night, 'and though he is an agent it is quite possible that he may have, you have not always lived in these rooms? All this is modern, while his effusive imagination roamed down the corridors of time to when the king came to his own again.'

It looked round the room thoughtfully. 'The agent knows his business and can tell the truth judiciously. As for this place, it is a mushroom. The spawn from which it sprang is the ruin yonder. Some day I will tell you a story on the spot which will please you. Of course when it tumbled about my ears I moved here. That is the worst of becoming attached to a place; to remain in it becomes almost a necessity.'

‘And like yourself,’ I said flippantly, ‘necessity knows no law.’

‘Ah,’ It replied, ‘that is one of the devil’s glib lies. By a little anecdote I will show you how it works, and to please you I will call it “THAT WHICH KNOWS NO LAW.”’

He was a queer old fellow. A hairless face, wizened like a year-old pippin, rounded shoulders heaved up to the lower tips of his ears, and brushed by a fringe of crimped grey hair; while through the close lattice-work of wrinkles peered a pair of beady black eyes, sharp and shifting as a bird’s. A thin grey line over a shrunken square chin served him as a mouth, and you have his portrait.

As for his dress, a coarse, dull blue canvas shirt hung loosely over a bony structure which might have served for the ribs of death himself. Below, a pair of polished brown shanks were thrust from scant trousers, and on each knotted knee rested a curved claw, the bones showing white under the tightened skin.

We were the only two fools in the car. The wise men had stayed at home, or taken the northern route, for even in September the

Denver and Rio Grande Road is abhorrent to human flesh. The heat, sand, and alkali dust had smothered my energies, and I was content to sit still, and keep my tongue busy easing the cracks in my lips.

Outside each window a cloud caught up by the current of our motion whirled along. Between its shadows, strange fantastic shapes of arid rocks loomed into outline, sharpened, disappeared—shapes as of dismantled castles, ruined battlements, shattered walls, with turrets, keep, and bastions, all complete—riven and tottering. Above the dust-storm were the far-away summits of sun-dried mountains, flickering and winking in the heat. It was stifling; a red-hot grip on heart and lungs, and our hot eyelids closed painfully over scorching balls.

At the best it was weak comfort that there was at least one other such fool. Still it was comfort until his rabbit skin cap crushed my satisfaction. There might be two of us, but there was only one idiot; and he, plainly, was not the man at the other side of the car.

Then I groaned inwardly, and sank under the terrors of my own vituperation. It was at this point that my friend roused himself into active life. From a pocket in the small of his back—his shirt back, I mean—he

produced a curious flat stone bottle, with a screw top. This, with much careful precision, he removed, and the gurgle which followed, sounding pleasantly through the heat, raised my dust temperature ten degrees. Wiping first his own, and then the bottle's mouth with the sleeve of his shirt, he politely offered me refreshment.

‘Here y’ar, stranger; freshen ye up in the dust. Californy grape brandy, and blazin’ strong. Stoke up, won’t ye?’

It was the very word for it; stoke up into spontaneous combustion. Ten O.P., with the temperature 130. After a preliminary lick at my lips, to bring them into working order, I offered hasty excuses.

‘Wa’al,’ he said, ‘I guess a man knows best what suits himself, and this suits me.’ Whereupon the pleasant murmur of the stream again arose, and an aroma as of a shattered whisky cask was added to the burdens of the air; then the bottle disappeared as mysteriously as it came.

It served as an introduction. I think he was grateful for my self-denial; certainly the refusal gave no offence, for he almost immediately quitted his place, and crossing to my section sat down facing me.

‘I guess you never knew what it was to

want a good drink—downright wanted it. I never met the man as had, who shook the chance when he kem across it. Of course, ye've bin thirsty; good whisky wasted at the narrer end of a long glass; but to want a drink, downright want it—ah, that's another kind o' a hoss altogether. Now, I hev; oh yes, lived here most my days, when there warn't nothin' but prarie, pizon dust, and Injuns from the Colorado to the Platte, an' roarin' good days they was, too. No, there ain't any Injuns round here any more now, 'cepting in the reservations, an' a good job, too, for of all the—— wa'al there ain't any sense kickin' a dead dog, so I'll let up. Thirst! Ah, I'll tell ye about it; there's an Injun mixed up with it, too, an' mebbe ye'll feel like a sup when I get through.

‘D'ye know the kind o' country we're passin' through? Ye'd think it was all made by the Devil, but it ain't. They do say as how he slacked his jaw a powerful heap over creation, pickin' holes in this, an' sneerin' at that, an' seein' no good in anything, as folks as has his drop in them does still, till God Almighty just give him his fling to go ahead an' try his hand—an' he began right here, an' busted on the job. For it's the Devil's Peak, an' the Devil's Cañon, an' the Devil's

Dip ; the Devil's this and the Devil's that over the hull face o' the accursed land. And, by the poker, I go far to believe the yarn, for takin' it by and large, it's the God-for-sakenest country man ever clapped eyes on. Yet, though ye'd scarce credit me, there be nooks and spots o' the sweetest kindliness through it that yer heart could laugh over—water-holes an' the like. Now an' then the water overflows a bit, an' then—why, yer Central Parks, yer Woodward Gardens, yer dandy, daisy spick an' span horticultoor east an' west, ain't in it. Don't look like it, do it ? Wa'al, stranger, come a three days' travel up them cañons, and I'll show ye glory—if ye ain't dead fust, for it's powerful dry travellin'.'

'It's a matter o' thirty years since I kem here fust, prospectin' for placer gold, an' findin' it, too, but none so plenty. It's nateral I didn't fix myself up just here about where a jack rabbit 'ud roast to death afore it could streak a mile. My, but it's powerful hot in July ; this ain't a sentiment to it. No, sir ; but up through them hills, at one of them places I was tellin' ye about, an' there with my gun, an' hoss, an' pack mule I was set up ; for there was game in them days, an' some o' them spots is a matter o' three mile across, an' more.

‘Now an’ then a white ’ud happen around, but mostly ’twar Injuns—a thievin’ lot, more sot on yer hoss nor yer scalp. Then, when one place petered out, why, I’d pack up an’ off to another water-hole, rakin’ the cañon beds as I went, for at times there’s a roar down them places as ’ud wash all the gold from this to Californy.

‘But once I had the cruellest bad luck. I was crossin’ from one big water-burst to another, an’ campin’ for the night by a little spring that just bubbled up like a pot, an’ then oozed away, the Lord knows where; ’twas fifteen mile from one burst, an’ seventeen to the other. Wa’ll, just at sun up, the mule an’ the hoss stamped, an’ left me sittin’ starin’ at their dust. I tell ye, stranger, things looked pretty mean as that dust sobered down into the heat-haze a glimmerin’ over the sand. There warn’t an inch o’ shelter for a couple o’ mile, an’ then it was out o’ my road, but I made for it all the same, fillin’ both myself an’ my two-pint can as full o’ water as we’d swell to.

‘Whoo!—what a scorcher it was, that two-mile walk over the sand, the alkali skin crisp and cracklin’ under every step, an’ the sun blazin’ like a red-hot copper bullet runnin’ down the back o’ yer neck. That’s whar I was wrong, d’ye see? I should hev made a

line for the nearest water-burst, but the shadder o' the big red rocks kind o' called me, an' I wanted to sit an' think it out without broilin' my brains.

'After 'most an hour I crawled to shelter under a chunk o' sandstone the size o' a Broadway block, an' plumb at the face like a brick wall, an' looked the chances square in the face, an' mighty ugly they war. Two pints o' water, nary a crust o' bread nor hunch o' meat (that was all strapped on the darned pack mule), an' seventeen mile of a stretch to the nearest bite or sup—an' such a stretch!

'Right below war a big cañon, the sides clawed and scratched, split and twisted, like as if a wild cat ten times bigger nor the American eagle—an' that's a big bird—had been hauled down it by the tail. T'other side was a blazin' red cliff, peaked an' butted like the Tower o' Babel stretched into the wall o' Chaney, an' t'other side o' that was no-man's-land. I couldn't see it, but I knew it well—a sand prarie, with alkali crystals for grass, an' red an' yaller boulders for sage brush.

'Wa'al, there war no "wait, hoss, an' ye'll get grass" wi' me. No, sir; it was "root, hog, or die," and I guess I rooted. It wasn't the clamberin' down into the cañon, nor the toein' up the shifty, cavin' sand-bank t'other side was

so bad—bad enough, fillin' yer mouth an' nose an' eyes with smartin' dust that choked an' burnt an' dried ye to a tinder. It warn't that —no, sir; it war the solid trampin' over the dead level that knocked the grit out o' me.

‘Trampin', staggerin', toilin' on, with yer tongue rattlin' like a dry hickory nut agin yer teeth; the sun blazin' down, an' the alkali glisterin' up till ye'd think it riz an' hit ye slap in the eyeball. Trampin' on, trampin' on till yer boots crack in the heat, an' yer toes curl and shrivel with the pizon dust, till yer lips grow black an' yer eyes see nothin' but blood. Oh, the slidin' an' the clamberin'—that kep' a man's heart alive; but the steady, straight, hopeless-lookin' pull beat all. Why didn't I wait for night? See ye here, stranger, when you get caught in such a fix, ye'll do it all daisy like, clean an' cool, I don't think. Why didn't I wait for night? Anyhow, I didn't, an' that's the end o' it.

‘Two pints o' water ain't a Palmer Lake, an' a blessed drink just at sundown drained the can dry. Then I tried rest, but was creepy like, and couldn't settle down; every pinch o' skin seemed crawlin', till at last I gave it up an' took to trampin' again. Night or day war all the one to me, so far as travellin' went. Sun or stars, I could make my line, but I must

have slipped the track somehow, for the sun shot up behind me, with the sand an' the Devil's mountains all about, an' nary a thing else.

'I ain't goin' to tell you how I got through that day; 'tain't no use. Once I saw a man slow roasted to death under a busted locomotive, pinned by the leg, an' charred to a cake. For all the world that was me. Mirage? Yes, sir, twice. First time I just sot down in my tracks an' laughed, crackin' my lips till the blood came; to see half a shot away the glimmer o' water through the bushes, an' long, trailin' willow boughs ripplin' lines across it; when thar warn't no water, nor no bushes, nor no trees—nothin' but a winkin' haze that flickered an' rolled about the sand hollers till I fairly set foot in it. Second time I knew better, an' didn't play fool, though my heart choked my throat with the jump it gave, it was so darned like. Then at the end I went clar mad; capered an' danced an' tried to sing, an' fetched no sound but a hoarse screech that rasped my throat like a file. That I can mind, an' I can mind fallin' headlong behind a big red rock with vi'let bands all round it, clawin' an' tearin' at the sand, diggin' for moisture like, an' I mind no more till a cool trickle o' water war streamin' down my throat, an' through the mist o'

blood in my eyes I could see a copper-coloured face peekin' down into mine.

‘Curius how near humans some Injuns is. Take ‘em all round, hangin’s a waste o’ good rope ; but some o’ them has their use, I do allow.

‘It was fallin’ twilight when copper-hide picked me up ; an’ what with a sup o’ water now, an’ a bite o’ meat again, an’ a snooze like as I never had a snooze afore, I war ready for the road in a kind o’ a way two hours wantin’ sun up.

‘Wa’al, we pegged it them two hours, slow enough, for express travellin’ warn’t my line just then ; but steady, too, the copper-skin helpin’ me along when the walkin’ grew heavy, which it did at times whar a breeze had piled the sand, an’ it war like wadin’ in over yer ankles. Then we curled up behind another big rock, an’ dodged the sun all day, slippin’ round with the shadder, an’ tryin’ to make believe as it was cool.

‘Only for me he would have made bolts o’ half a mile, or a mile mebbe, an’ thar have sheltered again ; but that warn’t my kind that day anyhow, an’ he hung on by me, dolin’ out sups o’ water from a big gourd slung to his back. Now an’ then we put in a dog’s sleep, but not much o’ that with the air grillin’ all round us. Just whar he kem from I couldn’t

make out. I didn't sabbe his lingo, an' he didn't sabbe mine, but he waved his hand away east and north. As for whar he was goin' to, he bided his time till the stars kem out—for me I was clar lost—then drew a line on the sand, an' nodded his head, so; an' it being cooler, we pegged on again. 'Bout midnight, or a bit later, we halted, an' he made signs as we were to sleep a bit; but fust we had another bite and sup, an' after we had our tot he filled this here stone bottle from the gourd, an' that was all the water he had; so that set me thinkin.' So I points to the stars, an' then away out ahead, an' draws a line in the sand, an' looks him in the face. But he shook his head an' studied the sky a bit, an' drew a line alongside o' mine, but slopin' different. Then I draws it out long, an' looks at him, an' points from whar we'd come, an' makes signs. An he nods his head an' draws a line behind us, an' another line about four times as long before. So I reckoned we had a longish journey to tackle. Then we set to sleepin', but when stretchin' myself I digs the toe of my boot into the line drawed by the Injun, an' gouged it out deep. Then I stretched myself, but didn't sleep; not much, thar war too much hard thinkin' to be done, but the Injun was breathin' like a tired child in three minutes.

‘Wa’al, I waited about a half an hour, watchin’ the stars, an’ breathin’ deep, an’ takin’ my bearin’s slick like an arrow. Then I hitched myself up an’ looked at the Injun. I couldn’t knife a sleepin’ man, but the water was bound to give out, an’ a white man is worth six Injuns any day, so I acted straight, an’ laid no hand on him, but grippin’ the water bottle in my left, an’ a knife in the right, I started down the line.

‘In that clear air you can hear a rifle shot a matter o’ nine miles, an’ I guess I had tramped two full hours or better when thar was the awfulest screech behind me, an’ I knew the Injun had woke up. I knew more ; I knew he would be on my track mighty smart, an’ I had better hump myself, an’ you can bet I just did. ‘Fore long the sun was on us, an’ that kind o’ helped me, for I kep moistnin’ my lips from the stone bottle, while the Injun must have suffered awful, racin’ in the heat with nary a drop.

‘All that day I stuck to it, an’ all that night follyin’ out the stars as the Injun had pinted me, only restin’ a short spell an’ not darin’ to sleep lest I would wake with six inches o’ steel in my ribs. Off with the sun next day, an’ once I kem across an ebbin’ spring, a hole like a basin with a dampness at the bottom ; but a couple o’ kicks caved in enough sand to dry

that up—an' I was off again. Wa'al, sir, the sun war three parts down when I rounded a spur o' yaller rock, an' fell on my knees, an' cried like a babby; snivelled an' dribbled, dry as I was. There was trees, there was grass, there was water; no mirage this time. It wasn't more nor half a mile away, but I felt that weak, it was sundown when I got neck-deep in the blessed pool.

'Next mornin' I reckoned I'd do the square thing by that Injun, though he *was* nothin' but a copper-skin, an' fruit an' water ain't much o' a meal for a man to face the desert on, an' yes, sir, it's true, I made a back track, follyin' up the trail o' the day before.

'Wa'al, I found him. D'ye mind that water hole I told ye of, it as I kicked the sand into. He was flat at its edge, with his arms spread-eagled in front o' him, an' his hands crooked like claws, stark dead, with his head burrowed into the damp sand, an' his black tongue kind o' lickin' at it to the end. Tough end for a man, wasn't it?

'Good old stone bottle, ain't it, stranger? Guess ye'll have a sup now, mebbe?'

'A scoundrel,' I cried; 'a fiend, thief, traitor, murderer are words too weak for such a villain.'

‘Nonsense,’ It said coolly. ‘You mistake. He was simply a victim of misplaced proverbial philosophy. I grant you that in his case there was room for a quibble as to the meaning of necessity. Had it been you or me, the rights would be clear enough.’

Whereat I went for him. ‘It seems to me that you and your cousin Asmodeus are pretty much of a pair, with little to choose between you, if these be the things your study has sought out.’

‘You are sore and angry,’ It replied; ‘and like all angry men you are unjust. Is it my fault if I have found these things in human nature? Blame yourself; are your sympathies really with that which is higher? Remember you would none of my poet. Be candid, do the shadows of the picture not awaken your interest rather than the higher lights? possibly, no doubt, through some strange law of antipathies. Well, to restore your self-respect, I will send you to bed with another little story which I will call “A TRANSLATION.”’

With the exception of two nephews—sons of brothers—Benjamin Nethersole had neither kith nor kin. It was therefore only natural that he should divide his property between these two. Considering the nature of the man

it was also only natural that he should divide it after the fashion he did—the four hundred a year in land to John the rustic ; the nine hundred a year in house rents of the city of London to Tom, M.A. of Cambridge, and man about town.

A pound a day and an extra sovereign on Sundays will be wealth to John, he had said. The lad can settle down quietly and breed pigs and poultry to his heart's content. As for Tom, kid-gloves and cigars cost more than leggings and a briar-root, so Tom shall have the houses ; the truth being that he loved Tom the better, but being a fair-minded man he squared his conscience to his wishes, and so kept it quiet. Besides, he thought, John will take care of the land ; as for Tom, Smalls the agent will take care of both him and the houses for his own sake. So, seeking to manage the affairs of this world from the next, Benjamin Nethersole when his time came laid himself down and died ; and Nethersole nephews reigned in his stead.

In spite of his money they were both genuinely sorry for the not unkindly cantankerous old man ; and John the rustic had no hard words to say over the unequal division of the property.

The law had placed each in possession of his

share, and the two men were dining together for the last time before John returned to the country.

‘I don’t grudge it to you, old fellow,’ he said; ‘though nine from thirteen and not much is left, I daresay you need it more.’

‘Nonsense,’ the other answered, laughing; ‘what are you? a squire, a county nob; a man with “a stake in the country, by Jove,” and all that sort of thing. What am I? a rackrenter if all were known. The pill would need five hundred a year to gild it. Besides, land breeds land, and inside of two years we’ll have you marrying some heiress whose fat acres march with yours, and your four hundred will be a thousand.’

‘That,’ said John the rustic, ‘is, of course, all nonsense; but, by the way, have you seen this milch cow of yours? Property, you know, has its duties as well as its privileges.’

‘No, to tell the truth I hinted to Smalls something about running down to see the place, and he looked as if I had accused him of embezzling the bricks and mortar, so I gave up the idea.’

‘The more fool you,’ said practical John; ‘and what rot to talk of running down to see the place as if it was at Land’s End!’

‘It’s worse than that,’ laughed Tom, ‘it’s

somewhere in the wilderness of the east—two miles beyond nowhere.'

' Better be your own agent for all that ; what business has an agent sweating an idle fellow like you of two and a half per cent ? '

' Because it's cheaper, my friend, much cheaper, and it's not two and a half, it's five ; but it would cost me more than that in cabs and disinfectants. I keep Smalls from economy,' and the subject dropped.

Dropped for a time that is ; six months or so later it cropped up in an unexpected fashion. Old Benjamin Nethersole had died in early spring, so the time occupied by the process of law, together with the six months following, brought nephew Tom and the rest of the world to the last days of October. A kindly wind had swept the sky free of smoke and fogs, and every yellow star-point showed clear in its dusky setting. A fine night, with a crisp, cool air that sent the healthy blood tingling through Tom's veins as he walked home from his club ; the leaves from the trees which bordered the last hundred yards of his walk crunching and rustling under his feet in almost rustic fashion. They are pathetic things, these London plane-tree leaves with their brief youth and scanty promise, and never so leaf-like as in decay. They are like London children, aged, world-

worn and withered before their time, never so human as when their premature winter put its blight upon them.

On the steps leading to Tom's lodgings a woman sat leaning against the railings asleep: a huddled figure with the head bent upon the knees, and a faded plaid shawl covering all. A scarcely conscious thought was all he gave her until the next morning, when the maid said to him as he sat at breakfast—

‘If you please, sir, there's a woman wants to see you, she says, and she won't go away.’

‘Oh, some beggar,’ said Tom; ‘here, give her a shilling if she looks as if she wanted it worse than I do.’

‘But, sir, she asked for you by name; and if you please, sir, I think she has been waiting all night.’

‘All night? Eh? Why she was on the steps when I came in; here, I'll go down and see her at once.’

She stood by the hall door as he went downstairs; thin, haggard, and white. A woman of the slums, plainly enough, but clean and tidy, after her fashion. Without waiting for him to speak she cried, ‘If you're the new master, then I'm Jane Gregg from Grindstone's rents.’

Tom looked at her doubtfully a moment. He knew the restless enterprise of the great

city's pariahs; but this looked out of the common.

Then he said, 'My name is Nethersole, if that's what you mean, but where's Grindstone's rents, and what can I do for you?'

As he spoke the woman half staggered and put her hand on the wall to steady herself. 'I'm dazed a bit with the cold,' she said; 'it was mortal chill with the first of the light. If you'll wait a wee, I'll come right.'

'I'm a fool,' said Tom, and it's more than likely that he interpolated a word before fool—a beastly fool. 'You wait where you are till I come back,' and he went upstairs three at a time, to return more soberly with a cup of tea and a slice of his special buttered toast in the saucer—'sit down there and take that, then we'll talk.'

'I said it,' cried the woman with a shrill hysterical fierceness. 'I said he wasn't a bad sort. Lord, how they'll talk in the rents when I tell 'em 'o this.'

'Now,' said Tom, as he thrust the empty cup and saucer away, 'what's all this about?' and he spoke sternly as a man does when he is ashamed of being conscious that he is touched; 'where's Grindstone's rents, and what do you want with me?'

But Jane Gregg had not sat on his door-

step ten hours to be frightened, nor were the dwellers in Grindstone's rents easily balked of their say. 'It's this way,' she answered. 'I'm Jane Gregg, whose man pays you four bob a week, and it's come cruel hard to have Smalls raise the rent, and times so bad. So I says to Bill, "I'll go bail the new man ain't a bad sort; he ain't old enough to be a bloodsuckin' skin-flint like him as is in his own place, so I'll see him, if we're sold up and chucked into the street for it."

'I'm afraid,' said Tom very gravely, 'that I'm a bigger fool than I thought; for the life of me I can't make head or tail of what *I* have got to do with it—who's Grindstone—and what's his rent?'

An odd slackness seemed to seize on Jane Gregg's jaw, for her mouth quivered at the corners and then fell open; at last she said, with a flickering laugh in her faded eyes, 'You're Grindstone, and I'm thinkin' you'd best come and see the rents yourself.'

'Oh,' said Tom doubtfully, 'I'm Grindstone, am I? I don't feel like it, and how does it come about, and what's this about Smalls' raising the rents?' Then a new thought struck him. 'Good heavens! are they all like you?'

But Jane resented the underlying reproach. 'Na,' she said, with a brief, stern relapse into

her early tongue, 'maist's waur. I'll tell ye the whole truth, it ain't Grindstone's rents they call it there, it's Grindstone's 'ell—and a good name too. First it was "Nethersole's," then came Smalls bloodsuckin' for more money, and we called him Netherstone—the old man 'is 'eart was so 'ard. Then came another turn o' Smalls' screw, and we called it Grindstone's 'ell straight to 'is face, and 'e just laughed and said, "Why don't ye git if ye don't like it?" and how could we git wi' three or four or five weeks to pay, and all our sticks to be sold up for the few shillins? Then 'e comes yesterday and says, "The new man's cursin' me for a soft-hearted fool. It's another sixpence a week all round," 'e says—"not my doin'," says Smalls, "it's 'is." So I ups and says to Bill, "I don't believe 'e's such a bad sort, and I'll see 'im to his face and tell 'im God's truth o' the grindin' and the suckin' and the sweatin' o' the poor, though 'e flings the lot o' us into the gutter for it."

Tom drew a long breath. 'By George,' he said, 'there are two more rascals in the world than I thought there were, Smalls is one, and I'm the other.'

When about nine hundred a year in house rents, as the lawyer had phrased it, had come to him from dead Benjamin Nethersole, he had made no close inquiry. Bricks and mortar

were bricks and mortar, and imagination had drawn a fancy picture of half a street of prim dismal dittoes at thirty pounds a year a piece, desperately uninteresting and eminently respectable. That he was what he had said in jest—rackrenting, and rackrenting the poor in tenement houses—had never entered his thoughts ; and now when the truth came home to him it sickened him, which is a wholesome way that truth sometimes has.

‘Here,’ he said roughly (a man is often like a chestnut burr, rough on the surface when he is at his best inside), ‘sit down and wait.’ Then he went upstairs, poured out and swallowed thirstily a cup of tea, and sat down to think. At first thought came slowly—concentration was impossible—then faster and clearer. No need to give them all, but presently they took a whimsical turn. That silver cigarette case: flesh and blood had toiled thirteen hours a day for nine weeks to pay for that. That cigar flung away unfinished, children in the slums had gone half starved that he might smoke it!—what was that about causing to pass through the fires of Moloch ? Nothing to do with the turning children’s daily bread to tobacco ash? Everything he possessed became for the moment incarnate—his very clothing! Why, it was but the day

before that he had bartered a human soul's two months' travail on a pair of boots. Bathos, you will say; but to him it seemed as if to wear them would be to walk in blood. Then he pulled himself together with a start. Jane Gregg was waiting him, and Grindstone's Hell had to be faced.

Just how he faced it, doing his 'half a league, half a league, half a league,' with Mrs. Jane Gregg in a four-wheeler, there is no need to tell in detail. Only, his old lodgings knew him no more, and Nethersole's rents—Grindstone's no longer—had but one more visit from Mr. Smalls—a memorable visit, which but for certain inexplicable omissions in his accounts, would have resulted in an unprecedented congestion at next morning's police sittings, for Nethersole's rents took full receipt out of Mr. Smalls.

Was there ever a kindlier true knight than old Don Quixote; a soul of selfless devotion born out of due time—a simple-hearted gentleman—a dupe—a fool—a gentle-hearted simpleton? That was what his friends said of Tom Nethersole when he girded himself and went down into the dragon's den to combat vice, ignorance, and filth. A member of no society, holding no visible commission from this world or the next, he went down to fight, like Hal o'

the Wynd—for his own hand. How he overthrew and was overthrown, how he cut, thrust, hacked, and hewed, how he belaboured, and was belaboured, is not of this story—‘A fool,’ said his friends; ‘but he will soon tire.’

When he had struggled six months, through one unspeakable winter, and though wearied had never tired, practical John left his pigs and poultry for an entire day to remonstrate.

He found Tom in the blind alley at the head of which were the tenements. From the outer street, through the entire length of the court, ran an open cutting where he was overseeing the laying of drain-pipes. As the cousins shook hands, John noted how the months had wrought their change in the other’s face and manner; he was whiter, thinner, with a deeper look behind the eyes, and a firmer set of the mouth than John had ever seen before.

‘Those fellows knock off in another half hour,’ he said, ‘and I daresay we can trust even the British workman for that length of time. So come into my haven of refuge and pelt me with hard words as much as you like.’

‘Old fellow,’ said John the practical, as with linked arms they walked across the court, ‘of course this sort of thing is all right; and what’s that?’ and he pointed to a ridge of lately turned ground running parallel with the open

drain, and disappearing round the bend of the houses in the direction of the main thoroughfare.

‘That? Oh, that’s water. Before I came here they had to go a hundred and fifty yards up the street for water, and precious little they used, inside or out. I would have liked to have put it into all the rooms, but the place would have tumbled down about my ears, and even if it had held together, an epidemic would have followed the breaking up of the crusted filth.’

John paused and looked up and down the court. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘that’s practical; a gas and water philanthropy is all right; its logical, Q.E.D., and that sort of thing; but this flesh and blood sentiment of yours! no man in his senses could sympathise with that.’

‘But that,’ said Tom Nethersole, ‘is exactly the point in debate.’

Just as they entered the doorway there came an outcry from the court, a shrill burst of wrath, at first incoherent in its rapid high-pitched articulation, but presently resolving itself into bitter curses and vile abuse.

‘This,’ said John grimly, as they turned back, ‘this is your flesh and blood philanthropy.’

‘No,’ answered Tom sorrowfully; ‘it is human nature of the slums, and after all not very different from the agrarian article.’

The workmen had flung down their tools and were grouped in a ring round two women, as callously curious and as eagerly expectant of a combat wherein someone else should suffer, as any Fiji Islander or Palustrian Roman in his amphitheatre. The race may die, but the type lives on triumphant.

The one woman was a woman of the court, bare-armed, bare-headed, and with patched skirts kilted to the knees. With clenched and uplifted fists she stood, pouring out an unfaltering stream of flaming wrath upon a waif of the streets, who, to her punishment, had drifted up the court; a sodden, bedraggled, sexless creature, with even the name of woman but faintly written across her shape.

‘My God,’ cried Tom Nethersole. ‘It’s Jane Gregg broke loose, and there’ll be murder done inside of three minutes.’

But the three minutes were ten times longer than Tom Nethersole required to thrust himself between the two women, and for half a week thereafter there were those of the heirs of the Romans who bore tokens that the arm of the Cambridge athlete had lost neither its weight nor its cunning.

What magic he used, John the phlegmatic never knew, for it was all over while he yet gasped; but as the one woman slunk down

the court he heard the cry, 'For your sake, Mr. Tom; but mind ye this, it's the last time for your sake or no, and the next of her tribe I catch up this court, I'll kill, though I hang for it! So help me God!'

It was then that Tom turned on the balked audience, and the wholesome truths he told them were good to hear, though John Nethersole shook in his boots at the direct picturesqueness of the language; and it was with an increased respect for the law-abiding principle of fear of consequences that he found himself at last with Tom, in Tom's haven of rest, and neither maimed.

'Don't think too hardly of the poor woman!' said Tom; 'there is something to be said on her side too.'

'Then why didn't she say it? your tenant's opinions were clear enough surely?'

'Oh,' answered Tom simply, 'who could be hard on that poor desperate wretch? It was Jane Gregg I meant, it's a miserable story. She has a daughter, a pretty fool of a girl, and three months ago one of these foul harpies—not like this one yet, though she will be some day—enticed her away. Since then Jane Gregg has been a madwoman, and some day there'll be murder done.'

After that there was silence awhile, and it

was in vain that John pulled himself together, and furbished up the arguments which for six months had so convinced himself. Somehow, inside of sixty seconds, they seemed to have had the bottom knocked out of them ; and it was with a vague uneasy feeling of shame that at last he blurted out, 'But what do you gain by it all ?'

For a moment the other sat silent, then said, 'Curious, but it never struck me in that way before. Do you know,' he spoke very slowly, like a man linking his thoughts backward, while his mouth grew pitiful, and his eyes moistened—'do you know what they called this place, and called it truly ? Grindstone's Hell—think of it—Hell, and God's men, women, and children living out their lives in it. What did I gain ? Do you think when those others, years ago, flung themselves into the jaws of death—the mouth of Hell—that they stopped to reckon up the gain ? If they had, would they have shivered the line, and stifled, if only for a moment, the roaring fires that made their Hades ? The gain of it all ? Little enough, nothing ; loss if you like, God knows !' Then there was silence again, and after the silence John Nethersole found there was nothing more to be said. Still, and he was glad of it after-

wards, they parted good friends at the mouth of the alley,—parted with an Englishman's hard grip of the hand, and an Englishman's ostentatious callousness, yet all the while with a twitch of the mouth and blink of the eyes which made John say, 'Confound it all,' to himself as he stamped his way up the road; and rather glad at heart when he found he had forgotten his stick and must go back for it.

The dusk had fallen when he re-entered the court; fallen thickly, and the lamps were as yet unlit. Behind him was the turmoil of the unflagging traffic, a hoarse unbroken monotone like the droning of pipes. From before, sharp and clear as the rattle of drum-taps came the shrill clamour of angry voices; life in the type asserting itself, as it always does above life in the mass. From a dozen windows on either hand the black torsos of men and women were thrust out, looming large like huge gargoyles in the uncertain lights, and through the clamour of voices came the quick cross fire of question and answer. Grindstone's Hell, hardened as it was to breaches of the peace, was alert and expectant.

Rounding an angle of the laneway, John Nethersole found the upper well of the court

crowded with shifting figures, and from the centre of the group Tom's voice rang out, strong and insistent :

‘Keep back, you cowards! You shall not touch the woman, I say. Back there, Jane Gregg, lest I forget you too are a woman! Back, I say!’

‘Na,’ cried the voice of Jane Gregg, her childhood tongue struggling to the surface. ‘Na, I winna back. I’ll hae the bluid o’ yon deevil if I hang for it. Back you, Tam Nethersole, or I’ll ding the brains outen ye.’ As she spoke, she lifted one of the huge stones left by the uprooting of the roadway. ‘Ye winna back, then tak’ that, an’ I’ll gie the hussy the next.’

From his place on the inner edge of the crowd, where he had forced his way, John saw a shadow flit in the twilight, heard a moan and a long-drawn hiss of sucked-in breath. Behind the fallen man a shivering woman raised up a white face to the failing light, and as she saw it Jane Gregg gasped, ‘My God, it’s my Mary come back—my ain wee Mary,’ and between them lay Tom Nethersole—dead.

‘All very well,’ I said when It had finished ; ‘but what do you mean by a Translation ?’ It was already dematerialising—there never was

such a guest for speeding his own parting—but It came back to say, 'For that you must ask the seventh from Adam.'

IV

A PASSING expression which had fallen from It induced me next day to visit the ruins against which the modern Gobelín Grange is built.

The system which had been followed resembled nothing so much as a species of root action which is found in certain plants. As the centre of life decays, it throws out to one side an offset which develops, flourishes, and decaying repeats the process by which it itself came into being. Year by year this is repeated, failing life is linked to budding life, leaving death behind in many mouldering generations. So with Gobelín Grange. At one end of the chain a many-century battered fragment of a Norman keep still faced the east. At the other the unpretentious Grange of fifty years ago formed the latest link. Between these two the handiwork of many a dead craftsman might be traced.

'My conscience,' said David, as we stood inside the Norman tower; 'a fine pack o' deevils trapesed hereaboots in their day. I

ken their sort weel. My forbears didna win their leevin' along the Marches for naething.'

'A degenerate age, David,' I said. 'No fine fat beasts to be had for the reiving; no raidings, no pibrochs, no claymores, sporrans and the rest of it.'

'Hoot, awa' wi' ye,' he cried; 'ye dinna ken what ye're talkin' aboot; ye're aye the same, you Saxons; Hieland robbers, Hieland robbers, an' a' the time suckin' us to the banes. What aboot yon chuckie an' thae collops? answer me that wi' your pibrochs and sporrans, ye wha didna ken a dirk frae a drumstick.'

'Yes, yes,' I said hastily; 'a lot of rascals in those days, but we've changed all that.'

'Maybe ay an' maybe no,' he answered dourly; 'a wheen deevils then, an' ae deevil noo, an' a sair uncanny ane at that. Like eneuch the ane's waur nor the mony, an' ye sae thick wi' him. I'm thinkin' I'll hae tae leave ye. It's awfu' hard on a man's character this consartin' wi' thae bodies or nae bodies.'

'But, David,' I said, 'you don't consort with It. I have never asked you to do that.'

'Na,' he answered, 'ye havena, and that's juist it.'

At which I thought it better to leave the rest of the ruins unexplored for that day. That evening I told It of my visit. 'A

pathetic place,' It said, 'full of incoherent tragedies, though men in those days were no less men than now, no more swayed by folly nor the less touched by self-sacrifice ; the same in fibre, though differing in method. Curious to note, too, how at times the vast shadow of the past projects itself across these latter days, and how the traditions of centuries, long since buried, still mould and direct thought and action.

' If you care to listen I will illustrate what I mean by the story of "THE TREE OF THE DEBEROWS."

There is a certain unlovely county in the west centre of Ireland, where vast stretches of bog keep up eternal warfare with beleaguering fields of coarse wiry grass ; where the holdings of the farmers are divided by drains and ditches instead of thorn hedges as in more favoured districts ; where forest life has only advanced a few pioneers in the shape of an occasional oak, elm, or pine, with here and there a luxuriant willow, the only genuine Irish native which takes kindly to water.

A dreary flat waste, almost a lake in winter, and in summer a wilderness of treacherous quaking depths reeking with moisture, and ever adorning itself with a white cloak of

vapour in honour of each brief visit of the sun, the level monotony only broken by black acclivities of half-cut turf banks, standing gauntly out against the sky. Mile after mile this desert of bog has held sway, but now its power is contested as the gradient slowly rises to the north-west. Patches of strong bent-grass become more common, and these again gradually merge into fertile fields, well sheltered by broad belts of pine and fir, and thickly scattered over with sheep or cattle. Here, surrounded by fat pastures and woodland, in a curious many-dated house, lived Hubert Deberow, the man with whom this story has most to do.

Many were Hubert Deberow's acres, stretching from the wild morass in the south and east to a certain dense wood of mixed timber, which, miles away, crowned the hill forming the north-west rim of the cup enclosing that wide depression extending over so many leagues of Irish soil. And varied was the nature of these same acres, comprising as they did on one side broad flats dedicated to snipe, bog-holes, wild duck and will o' the wisps; and on the other, corn-fields, whose autumn luxuriance was the pride of many who hated their owner, for Deberow was the best detested man in the kingdom of Connaught.

This hatred was not so much personal as hereditary, for the present head of the name mingled at too rare intervals with his humbler neighbours to have himself excited their wrath, while to such as were his tenants he had never been unjust or harsh ; but it was a tradition that the owner of the name of Deberow was to be hated ; and with charming thoroughness of character, hated he accordingly was.

It must be admitted that if Deberow did not actually cultivate the detestation of the peasantry, he certainly never attempted to gain their affection, but held them to be of inferior breed and intelligence ; regarding them as human possibly, animal probably ; not that he made ostentatious expression of his thought, being too cold and reserved a man to openly proclaim even his contempt.

Yet the quaint rambling old house, with its odd spasms of architecture, was a distinct source of pride to the humbler cottiers, who never failed to point it out to the rare tourist whose sins or misfortunes led him that way. To him they would descant upon its great age, how that gloomy central tower dated from Red Hugh O'Conor's time, as indeed might well be the case, for it was pure Norman ; and had stood seven hundred years of chances and changes in a country the plaything of chance

and much addicted to change. Right and left, the wings embraced specimens of well-nigh every succeeding architectural model, not without blemish in some of the earlier instances, thanks to the injudicious combination of fire and siege through which the building had passed.

But wonderful as was the conglomerate old house, it held only second rank in public estimation, chief place being filled by a certain oak which, if legends told truth, was something more than a sapling when the foundations of that Norman tower were digged. Many a curious tale was told of this tree of the Deberows with its history of eight centuries, and how its fate was inseparably joined to that of the family on whose land it stood.

Seven hundred years ago, before that weather-beaten, lichen-covered old keep was built by Hubert de Burgo to overawe his turbulent neighbours, and indeed before that sturdy coarse-grained Norman adventurer had darkened Connaught with his unwelcome presence, the district with which we have to do had been the chess-board of rival factions of the O'Conors, offshoots from the family of that Roderick O'Conor whose wild Kerns so signally overthrew Strongbow in 1174. Chieftains com-

placent enough to play the parts of the Kilkenny cats to the great benefit and satisfaction of De Burgo, who, finding the country fertile enough, and costing no more than a few hard strokes, sketched out with his sword his own title-deeds on the persons of the unfortunate remnants of the O'Conors, until there was a grim peace in the land and the laws were well obeyed, the code being a simple one—

That good old plan
That he shall take who has the power ;
And he may keep, who can !

Then, as already said, De Burgo erected himself a monument of his prowess, and with that stern tower as palace, castle, dungeon in one, he reigned an autocrat, doing whatsoever seemed good in his own eyes ; secure in the enforced loyalty of his men-at-arms, and knowing full well that John had but little leisure thought to give to such a paltry matter as the waste of a few score lives of western peasants, if waste it would have been deemed. So, presently, in full odour of sanctity, Hubert departed this life, and Rolf, his son, reigned in his stead.

Pleasantly and, for Connaught, not unpeacefully the years slipped by, too pleasantly as the event proved. For Rolf, grown indolent

through ease, relaxed his watchfulness, and one fine day on returning from hunting had ample opportunity of proving old Hubert's skill as a builder of fortresses.

The O'Conors having gained strength from the years of peace, and sinking their differences in the presence of a common foe, a procedure not unknown in our own day, had united to seize the old Norman tower, and Rolf found to his cost that the only safe tenure of Irish property was to utterly destroy its every possible claimant, a lesson which his descendants laid to heart. And thus the tables were turned.

For a generation or so the O'Conors lorded it like kings, and all the more royally for the period of deprivation; drinking to the dregs the cup of power and license, while the De Burgos, safe under the protection of that greater relative and namesake, whose descendant was one day to unite under his banner the larger part of the west and centre of Ireland, bided their time, and, taught by the bitter experience of their own downfall, watched the sure swing of the pendulum, and that opportunity which comes to him who waits.

But Rolf was gathered to his fathers, and a new Hubert had arisen before the day of reckoning dawned on the O'Conors. It was

bitter, bleak Christmas weather, snow lay inches deep on the desolate moors which stretched eastward from the castle to the frozen fen country, whence Feargus O'Conor drew his supplies of wild duck, and the fuel to cook them withal. And still the snow was drifting in a blinding horizontal swirl, beating straight in under the grim portcullis, and shutting out most of the little light which struggled through the narrow windows into the dim hall where Feargus held his revelry, serene in spirit through many months of quietness, and, by reason of the dreariness without, enjoying with greater zest the rudely furious pleasures of the feast. Now, whether the guard held wassail on their own account, or whether the driving flakes blinded their eyes, and the soft wreaths deadened all sound, history knoweth not. But the chronicler related how that on this Christmas day Hubert de Burgo the younger found his own again, slaying the hapless guard ere ever they had time to utter a cry.

The first intimation Feargus had of his coming doom was the ring of a sword hilt on the oak door as armed hands thrust it in. Little else did he learn, for these were the days of short shrift. In less than thirty minutes there was more blood on the floor than wine in the flasks, with not a man, woman, or

child of the Sept O'Conor left alive, save one, the O'Conors' mother.

She was an old, bent, witchlike creature, who so scared the soldiers with her hearty curses, that not a brute of them all dared touch her, not even Hubert de Burgo himself, though it may be he was weary of murder before he made his way to the corner where she stood at bay, pouring anathemas on the slayers of her sons, and shaking her crooked fingers in the very faces of the quarter circle of abashed wretches who stood in front of her.

Be that as it may, Hubert spared her life, but with the ferocious brutality of the time forced her to join the banquet with which the blood-splashed victors celebrated their triumph; while in careless heaps piled in corners, or still stretched on the floor where they died, lay the yet warm clay of all that she had held dear on earth. It may be that De Burgo would have let her fret out her days unmolested, had not her fierce spirit promptly sought to avenge the slaughter of her kindred by devoting the living and the dead to one red ruin of fire. But Hubert the elder had been too shrewd a builder, and the attempt failed, though half-charred beams and blackened walls proved the determined nature of the effort.

Great was De Burgo's wrath that his clemency should be so abused. What! had he, contrary to all rule, and in direct violation of the unwritten law, spared the witch's life to have her turn traitor? By St. John! she should taste the death she had planned for her benefactor. So the miserable wretch, still half mad from the sweeping destruction of her children, raving with grief, body and mind shaken with passionate hate, was dragged in no tender fashion across the courtyard and down the broad stretch of snow which dipped eastward to the fen district, and bound with chains to that oak whose trunk remains unto this day.

Then it seemed as though the wild passion burnt out, leaving nothing behind but calm inexpressible hate. For, says tradition, she reared herself against the tree stem, which was so soon to be her bier, as proudly as if she rested against a throne, and then through the thin veneer of Christianity broke out the paganism of her forefathers.

With a wild sweep upwards of her hands she burst into a wrapt invocation to the old gods of her country, ending with a bitter curse upon her persecutor to his furthest generation, until, half in terror and half in rage, De Burgo himself fired the faggots which had been

piled round her, and so stifled her denunciations.

It is unfortunate that tradition has taken no exact note of the imprecations heaped upon her murderer's head, for doubtless they would have contained a peculiar wealth of expression leaving little to the imagination. But running through the whirlwind of curses was a prophecy linking the fate of the oak tree to which she hung with that of the De Burgos ; and this tradition has handed down, so that for centuries never a limb broke from the stanch old trunk but evil fell upon the De Burgos, even from the very day of the curse ; for, says the legend, when the next morning broke clear and bright upon the level slope of snow, marred by that circle of trampled grass where centred a heap of black and grey ash surrounding the smoke-stained stem where, caught in at the waist and bent double, hung a ghastly something which had been human, there swung a drooping half-charred bough creaking with it in horrible unison till a stronger gust snapped the straining limb, and, even as the fibres parted, young Richard de Burgo, learning from an upper window his first lesson of the justice of might, fell headlong to the court below, and so learnt no more in this world of good or evil.

From that time forward the De Burgos, or

Deberows as they came to be called, kept a firm grip on their hard-won lands, judging with rat-like instinct when to quit the falling house of their masters.

Unwavering in their adherence to the Plantagenets until the broom showed signs of falling sere, the De Burgos of the day, with well-timed prompt discretion, substituted the Red Rose, the colour of which rapidly faded before Edward of York's convincing exposition of the superiority of the White. A century or so later religious scruples, hitherto unknown in the records of the house, troubled the conscience of the reigning Deberow; but not until Elizabeth was firmly seated on the throne, and the Armada a thing of scorn and jest, was he quite persuaded of the truth of Protestantism. And if any proofs of the effect of heredity be necessary they will be found in the rise of similar anxious doubts during the brief struggle between James and William, but the fall of the former was an argument powerful enough to set those doubts at rest, and for ever.

Not that the family passed unscathed through all those troublous times. Was there not a hot-headed De Burgo who assumed the White Rose just one battle too soon, and whose six inches of pike in the back was visited on the family oak through medium of a blinding thunderstorm

which shore off a mighty branch. Many a goodly bough fell by reason of misjudged activity on the Stuart's behalf; while, still later, a Deberow fell victim at the Boyne through giving ill-advised credence to his conscience when it whispered that James, if successful, would surely strip the family honours from the elder branch, and bestow them on the faithful younger scion. So, inopportunely, he ratted to the losing side, and tradition credits him with a longer rope than shrift.

But now all those days of shifty policy were past, and old Hubert Deberow lived alone with their ghosts, secure in the possession of his many acres. Alone; for though of his three sons two were left, yet one had parted from his father in anger, possessing in common with him the rough temper of that first Hubert, and each in their wrath careless how sorely their tongues wounded. The other, his father's darling, was abroad with his regiment. So, day by day, the old man lived out his hard austere life, seeing nothing of his neighbours; hardening his heart against the heir to his name, and yearning after the son of his old age with a desire all the more keen for its suppression.

And day by day he passed the hours in the shade of the grim old Norman tower, watching with almost changeless gaze the oak

of the Deberows ; for the family legend had writ itself deep upon his heart, and the possibility of a fresh fulfilment of the tradition haunted him with a horrible dread that was almost a hope.

The watch-gate and outer wall enclosing the courtyard had long disappeared, and the courtyard itself transformed into a pleasure garden of smooth green turf, walks, terraces, and flower-beds. From Hubert Deberow's sheltered nook under the central tower nothing impeded the view down the sweep of lawn and field where stood the object of at once his hope and hate.

None can guess the agonies endured as hour after hour he watched the green leaves swaying to a summer breeze ; or the naked twigs stiff and clear against the grey of a winter's sky ; his mind dwelling on each recurrence of disaster, and his father-heart full of conflicting passion. Even in the sultry quietness of mid-August, or in the tranquil calm of a winter's frost, a bough might droop and crash, and that hated elder son pass away, to leave the child of his pride a free path to his possessions. But a terror for that dear son would crush back the unnatural hope ; and as night fell it would be with a sigh of relief that as yet all was well, he turned and passed into the only room

in the old rambling house which he really loved.

No gloomy many-shelved library such as became his years and reserve, but a large lattice-windowed room hung round with old-time weapons—halberts, pikes, sabres, matchlocks, flint-locks, rifles—together with trophies of many a day's sport such as Rolf, his own Rolf, had delighted in.

Here he would sit, slipping the hours through his fingers as he planned the great doings there would be when Rolf came home, the future master of all; rousing himself once and again to hearken for the snap and rustle of a bough; and so, with the break of a lonely solemn meal, the hours would pass. Then to bed, where in times of tempest—and the old house rarely missed the full brunt of a passing storm—he would lie awake shaking, prayers and an unnatural hope holding warfare in his soul.

Mad! You would have found him shrewd enough at a bargain, and the keen hard-headedness of Hubert Deberow was a proverb throughout the county.

One night in late autumn, while the leaves were yet upon the trees—a night succeeding many days in which summer passed tranquilly to rest untroubled by fret of storm—old Hubert, throwing wide the shutter that the moon might

fill his room with light, bowed and prayed an awful prayer, then, without undressing, lay down on his bed, and set himself to watch the oak-tree, whose dark shape cast a blot on the stretch of silvered lawn. The minutes stole upon him with irksome slowness, eleven crept to midnight, midnight to one, and still the boughs reached upwards to the clear sky tremorless. Two lagged slowly into life, painfully, wearily yielding up its ghost while that black shadow unhastingly moved eastward ; and all through the halting hours the old man lay praying his terrible prayer, and watching with unwavering eyes the motionless outline, hard and grim against the moonlight.

Three rang hollowly through the silent house, when suddenly the outer stillness was broken ; a rustle of leaves as a huge bough of the old oak staggered an instant in the air, then with increasing swiftness toppled outward and fell crashing on the grass, while old Hubert Deberow, propped on rigid arms pushed behind him on the pillows, looked out with straining eyes ; then reaching forward he pulled the shutters close, and lay back on the pillows. 'Rolf, my king ! Rolf, my king !' he kept whispering to himself ; 'he has come to his own at last. Why did I never pray before ? All for you, Rolf, my king !'

‘Rolf’s at last!’ that was the one dominant thought. Richard? He had never loved Richard, and of late indifference had grown into hate, for did he not stand in Rolf’s path? Why had Rolf not been the elder son? and then, perhaps, poor Richard—yes, he could think kindly of him now, thank God; he had no hard feeling against poor Richard, a kindly lad enough, and had he lived all would have been his, for he had never sought to put his rights from him. Well, well, God knows best, poor Richard; and now it was all Rolf’s, all Rolf’s. Rolf must marry, and that old oak send out new shoots to forerun fresh centuries of life for the Deberows; but Richard, ay, ay, poor Richard, thank God he had never wished him ill. So the prayer was forgotten.

And now the old monotony of life recommenced, and slowly the old terror grew again upon the heart.

Golden October faded into dreary November; the trees were leafless now, stark and naked as in the depths of winter. The sun seemed blotted out, so thick and heavy grey were the clouds; and as fitful breezes passed moaning through the bare woods, the bitter care of old Hubert Deberow increased. For the uncertain breezes grew into passionate gusts, shrieking and whistling as they swept

the bent branches, making them ring like tense cords ; uprooting, rending, destroying as the storm cleft a track of ruin through the belt of sheltering timber. Still the sturdy old oak, tossed and buffeted by the fury of the tempest, held on unscathed ; and, as hour slipped after hour, the strained agony slowly loosed its grip on Deberow's heart, until, as the slants of sunshine broke up the heavy cloudbanks, and the violence of the gale died into whimpers, a fierce exultation grew within him, a wild triumph in the future of his house. It was an omen, a sign ; and it was with a tumultuous passion of gladness that he lay down that night on the bed where a few weeks before he had kept unnatural vigil, and fell asleep with a calm tranquil contentment such as he had not known for many days.

When he awoke it was but little more than faint dawn, and a grey light filled the room with a sense of darkness. The first sound he heard was a sob from the shadows of the doorway, a choked breath and a voice that trembled, quenched and swallowed up in the roar and crash of a terrific thunderburst, while the dead storm rose again to sudden life, dashing the rain in masses against the window.

‘ Mr. Hubert,’ the whisper said ; ‘ Mr. Hubert.’

In a moment he was bolt upright, a chill catching at his heart, and he scarcely knew his voice as he answered harshly, 'Is it Conor?'

'Oh sir, sir; Mr. Rolf.'

With a bound old Deberow sprang at the shrinking figure, shaking it with the power of a madman. 'You lie, you scoundrel, you lie, you lie;' and then his voice broke into a wail, and he sunk in a heap on the floor, quavering out, 'Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!'

With crooked stiff fingers clutching the old servant, Hubert Deberow slowly climbed to his feet, and, still supporting himself with a tense grip, stood a moment motionless. Then, as again the light flared white, he thrust Conor aside, and dashed madly downstairs, across the courtyard, and with staggering steps ran to the maimed tree. There he halted, and in the grey of dawn was seen standing by the shattered bough, at first striking it impotently with desperate strength as it lay matted on the sodden earth; then with hands raised and wildly shaken in the face of heaven, as though passion found vent in curses.

Above, around, the wind howled and moaned; dense bursts of rain passed in heavy gusts across the field, and still he stood fronting the storm with upturned withered face and fiercely

gesticulating arms, while nearer and nearer rolled the tempest. Away to the east, over the moorland, the grey clouds parted, and the red rim of an angry sun broke through, only to flicker into yellow in the glare of a terrific thunderbolt, and when men's eyes could look again the oak of the Deberows and its last master were gathered into one common ruin.

'To me it seems strange,' I said, 'how fond you are of modern instances. All these things are of the last quarter of a century. Surely the rough youth of the world with its freshness and its growth, its unconscious strength, the giant still uncertain of its powers, must have held something better worth the telling.'

It shrugged Its shoulders. 'How very manlike you are, always eager to understand any age but your own. What a magnificent Areopagite you would have made. Will you pardon a digression while I tell you what my friend the poet wrote of the Unknown god, though I rather think you and he do not see through the same glasses?'

The wisest of the wise they were :
And all the clusters of the world
Were crushed into libation where
The smoke of many altars curled
To all the fragments of a soul,
That nature wears in nature's whole.

Too few the glories of the stars,
 The worlds of waters, or where trod
 The foot of man in farthest wars :
 There still remained the Unknown god !
 Craved after with uncertain hopes
 As dimness through a darkness gropes.

If haply the uncertain hand
 Thrust shrinking out, might touch, and hold
 What faith could blindly understand
 Was wrapped in all the manifold
 Suggestions of the One Supreme,
 Behind the pantheistic dream.

We wave them down, these dim-lit souls ;
 Unknowing, and unsatisfied :
 Yet pushing onward, seeking goals
 Where greater wisdom might abide.
 Too superstitious ! and we turn
 To where our secret altars burn.

Who is there has not bowed the head
 In vague petition to the void ?
 And flamed the censer, glowing red :
 With yearnings subtly employed
 To force a way into the light,
 Like any Areopagite ?

As mute, unglorious Miltons rear
 An altar that they cannot serve,
 Though all the passion of the seer
 Is kindled in the trembling nerve ;
 They strain the eyes ; there is but haze,
 And visions which evade the gaze.

The worship of our words we pour,
 Where every gaping echo hears :
 But hath the heart not, evermore,
 A liturgy for secret ears :

A sacred, shoeless-trampled sod ;
An altar to the Unknown god ?

Where in the silence of the night,
When all the world is dumb in sleep,
A vision breaks upon our sight
And sacrificial glories leap
In trembling, wingèd tongues of fire,
That shape themselves to our desire.

And through the circumscribing bands
Which bind our faith, we break our way,
And reach beyond to touch the hands
Of benediction. Then the day
Dawns on us, and we hear the cries
From Nature's common altars rise.

'All the same,' I said, 'you haven't answered my question.'

'Nor have you explained,' It retorted, 'why the modern pleases you less than the ancient ; the thing you have than the thing you have not. My reason is clear ; men use subtler methods in fulfilling their purpose than they did of old. If a man seeks revenge, a blow on the skull with a ragged stick however safely dealt, or even a dagger thrust between the shoulders, will not suffice. No, he will beggar his enemy in purse and morals if he can, and then let him live for the pleasure of the spectacle ; much as a boy of all ages would a pinned cockchafer.'

‘If that be true then—

Dragons of the prime
That tore each other in their slime,
Were mellow music matched with him.

‘Ah!’ It said, ‘how curious it is that you have no appreciation of intellect.’

Then It fell silent, and for the life of me I cannot tell whether or not It was laughing at me. At length It went on. ‘What then is your ideal, your heroic age? perhaps I can content your curiosity. The days before the world was? The slow compression of natural law forcing order and beauty out of the wreck of opposing forces? The tooth-and-claw struggle with those monsters of the slime you spoke of? The dominance of man over man and nature—which?’

‘The last I think. For surely it means the triumph of thought, and so must make the finest picture in the world.’

‘Ah,’ It said. ‘The Roman Empire in its perfection of power. Listen, then, to the story of “*LICINIA PAULLINA*.”’

I do not give the story here, since there is nothing more irritating than the ragged tags of a tale, for in the middle It broke off.

I suppose my face was white, and I know a cold sweat girdled me round the loins, and

I trembled like a man with an ague. It was an exaggeration of my first cigar.

‘Have you had enough of the triumph of thought?’ It asked grimly. ‘The dominance of man over man, lust uncurbed and cruelty unspeakable? Take a mouthful of whisky and pull yourself together. The realism of Nero’s age will excuse the stimulant. And yet that was Rome at its greatest.

‘Let us go a little farther back, and I will try to show you the humanness of one for whom no apologetics are ever offered; a proverb of evil and a byword of destruction. In my opinion she has been villainously maligned these two thousand years, and perhaps the story of “MEDUSA” may help you to forget that of Imperial Rome.’

There was an unusual peace in Olympus, the consequence of a reaction. Zeus had visited the earth with a fearful passion for strife and bloodshed, followed by a terrible pestilence; and now, seeing the suffering, was smitten by a spasm of regret.

His conscience was in arrears, and therefore uneasy, for the punishment had far outweighed the offence, a not uncommon case with the ancient immortals. So he soothed its prickings by a stern forbiddal of anything but kindness

to the sons of men. He even visited the earth himself, and this undeserved condescension almost renewed his self-satisfaction ; and the fact that there were miserable men and women who still resented the pangs of loss, even in face of his graciousness, greatly helped to blunt the edge of his remorse and rehabilitate him in his own good opinion. However, being a magnanimous god, he did not resent their bad taste and withdraw his protection, but only stored the memory away for future use, when the plainly undeserved tenderness had passed away. It followed, therefore, that it was a dull time in Olympus.

Deprived of their usual pleasure of picking to pieces their natural playthings, impaling them on their sorrows and passions like, as I have said, boys do cockchafers on pins, and curiously watch their convulsions, the immortals had but scant employment.

The scandals of the pretty cage where Aphrodite kept her doves were soon exhausted ; the stronger the spice the sooner the taste wearies. Athena, no doubt, had her study to which she could retire and win forgetfulness in philosophy, a trick much affected by common mortals ; and Artemis might still scour the hills and woods of Olympus, and even of the earth itself in vague expectation of another Actæon ;

while Ares and Hephaestus forgot domestic differences over the absorbing interest of the latter's forge fire; but to the lesser gods, unendowed with energetic faculties, it was a dreary time, and Medusa perhaps suffered more than the others.

To be sure her henchwomen, the Grææ, kept her company as usual, but they were only cheerful in working hours, and the enforced idleness made them cross and splenetic, so that they quarrelled over the possession of their one eye and lonesome tooth, and would have come to scratches, had Medusa not declared there could be no fair battle where only one could bite. But even Medusa seemed to lack interest in the quarrel, and did not vent her gibes and scorn in that vigorous language of which she was such an able mistress.

The three were upon one of the wide terraces surrounding the banquet and judgment halls of Olympus. Before them stretched the landscape, laid out under the joint direction of Apollo and Hermes, but they seemed to take no pleasure in its beauty; not even the undulating meads, dotted over with oaks and pines and olives with careless precision, and smothered in sunshine, held their interest. The bower of roses beloved of Aphrodite, the sweetness of whose perpetual bloom drifted

upon the pleasant strength of the breeze, had no delights for them. Rather they looked wistfully at the dark and mighty fastnesses which hemmed them round in the far distance, a wilderness of stony upheaval, divine in its savagery, yet mellowed into beauty by the purple haze which clothed it as in a transparent mantle. Beyond lay the earth.

‘I hate this peace,’ said Medusa, thrusting the sleeping snakes back from her forehead as she spoke; ‘it’s childish of Zeus, and I hate children.’

Then there fell a silence. The two grey sisters pressed one another’s hands and nodded their heads wisely, but said nothing. Very plainly Medusa was greatly annoyed, and experience told them that at such times silence was a discreet and sympathetic thing. Occasionally a touch of this divine wisdom is found among men, but not often.

Presently Aphrodite, drawn by her car of doves, swept across the fields, and, rising into the distant vapours, disappeared over the outline of the rocks. She always had duties upon earth.

‘I hate her,’ said Enyo, with hearty viciousness, as she watched the goddess set like a star behind the mountains. ‘Selfish, heartless, with never a kind word for a woman.’

But Medusa only shook her head slowly, and made no answer. She seemed pre-occupied, and while her eyes were looking wistfully into the distance, her restless fingers were busy plucking the fringe of her garment, shedding it in little fleeces on the white pavement of the terrace. Then her eyes dimmed a little, and her mouth trembled, till she set her teeth fast and forced the lips to cease from quivering.

Enyo, who had been watching her curiously, burst out into a coarse laugh, and croaked between the spasms of her merriment. 'By Momus, Pephredo, but Medusa is in love, she is blushing and shaking like a girl of sixteen. Was it the divinity of your eyes he praised, the waves of your shining hair, the sweetness of your lips; or did you find him stony-hearted, the wretch?—oh—ah—to laugh like this at my age. Medusa, you will kill me!'

But after the first flushing of the face and darkening of the eyes Medusa gave no sign, but stood staring with straight eyes over the dappled fields and flowery lands, seeing none of them. Then Pephredo plucked back her sister a step or two, and whispered angrily in her ear, so that the laugh died away from the toothless mouth, and the eye grew dull and troubled.

After a moment's hesitation she shuffled forward again, and leaned a skinny hand, not unkindly, on Medusa's shoulder, and whispered, 'Forgive me, dear, you are sweet enough indeed to win man's love if he could but look upon your face and live; fair and sweet enough for the gods, but that I think you hate them all. As for us, we are wrinkled hags, white-haired and shrunken, and love is not for us. Withered hearts are cruel in their callousness; forgive me, dear.'

For answer Medusa turned and flung her arms round the other's neck, while she buried her face on her shoulder, shaken the while by choking sobs which seemed to burst her chest in utterance.

'You poor dear,' whispered Enyo soothingly; 'here, sit down a minute,' and she shuffled into the hall, reappearing presently with a cup in her hand; 'there, now, dry your eyes and tell us all about it.'

Unquestioning Medusa drank as meekly as a child. Soon the sobbing ceased, and she sat, mute and shaking, looking blankly before her.

'Tell us all about it,' repeated Enyo, while Pephredo took Medusa's hand and stroked it gently.

'It was,' said Medusa slowly, 'it was down

below ; Zeus was angry with me, I forget why—it doesn't matter much ; nothing does matter much, least of all why Zeus was angry, and yet,' and Medusa paused, and looked with freshly moistened eyes over the glades and groves she saw so mistily.

The Grææ leaned forward expectant of more, but as Medusa sat silent—'Yes,' said Enyo inquiringly ; 'and yet ?'

'And yet, but for the anger of Zeus,' said Medusa, 'I would never have known him. So even out of the wrath of Zeus love may come,' and she dropped the cup with a crash on the pavement, and rocked slowly backwards on her seat, hiding her face the while.

Soon the silence became intolerable. Pephredo groping up again drew Medusa's hand towards her, but the other snatched it back, passionately brushing her finger-tips two or three times over her temples. Then she straightened herself up, locking her hands, and thrusting them clenched between her knees. Again there was a silence, but at last Pephredo broke its oppressiveness.

'Tell us, dear ; a secret moulders in the heart and poisons the sweetness of life. Bring it into the daylight, and let the breath of others' love play upon it. Are we not all in all to one another ?' And in reply Medusa

gave her a brief pathetic glance, and went on.

‘I was in Outer Barbaria ; Gallia, Hermes afterwards told me it was called—for my part I never sought to know—when Zeus’s anger smote me, and left me with no greater power of motion than that which belongs to the lower human creation ; and so, perforce, I veiled my face and played the woman. At the same time my divine powers were suspended, so that presently I suffered the pangs of mortal hunger and had not wherewith to buy even bread. And as I walked the streets of the city one of the heathen wretches sought to twitch my veil aside. The fool ! so little men know how destruction may lie in the light of a woman’s eyes, or how near they are to death when a woman looks upon them, but that the gods hold their hands.

‘Thrusting him aside I buffeted him backward, and so a tumult was raised, and in the midst of the turmoil came one to my succour, one who was not as the others, a Gothman they said, but a very god to look upon, a Zeus amid mortals, a full span taller than them all, fair as Apollo, brave as Ares, faithful as—as only man can be, and therein not like us gods.

‘It cheered my heart, it stirred my fierce

soul to see him with his broad bare hands buffet the ruffian weaklings this way and that, and prove himself akin to the nature which lay sleeping within me. How I longed to show my hero I was not the feeble thing I seemed! but for his sake I dared not. So with all my soul in arms I shrunk trembling aside and played the timid maid, winning his heart with the down-dropped modesty of my veil.

‘When all was over, and the wretch beaten senseless who had so nearly looked on death, yet his comrades bearing no malice—for were not blows their trade?—I followed him home as he bade me, and there for a time dwelt in his house a life apart, serving him humbly as became a woman, I, Medusa! yet showing such a cunning wordless devotion as could only a woman with the tincture of divinity in her veins, or the fire of love, which is but another name for divinity.

‘How I came to love him at the first I know not, unless it was his brave unselfishness, counting no cost of danger to shield a forlorn woman; and afterwards—afterwards? while love lasts there is no afterwards. And so it came that in not many days he loved me, and had never seen my face. What had that to do with love? Loved me, ay, worshipped me as was never worshipped before

Medusa the goddess, and would have had me wed him, me, Medusa, the serpent-haired horror of men, me, the woman who loved him!

‘And I, knowing the thing I was and am, repelled him for very love; I who never had known either tenderness or pity, flamed with consuming fire. The frozen deeps of all my being were broken up, and the touch of a poor human hand drove me trembling from the room lest the tumult of my yearning should break out and he would die. Oh, Enyo, Enyo, how weak are human loves! But I—I suffered and hid myself!

‘How long did I withstand him? Nay, I know not. For his sake I should have fled the place and hid myself in the barren wilds; but therein the goddess failed, and for his sake I was woman, and weak. My feet were leaden-shod and I could not move, and at the last I wedded him, and never did Medusa know what peace was till she lay upon her lover’s breast; and never has she known it since, nor ever shall again.

‘Then, day by day, the veil across my face drifted between our lives, for, though for a time he hearkened to my entreaties and forebore seeking to see my face, it was only for a time. Then, loverlike, he would seek to draw

it to one side, or as he caressed me strive to loosen the fillet which bound it round my head, but ever my watchfulness foiled him. Then he grew importunate, waxing wrathful or suspicious, because the women of the town talked. A curse upon their wicked wagging tongues that sow a strife betwixt wife and husband; but ever I bore it meekly, and turned away his anger with a caress. Then, oh, hardest of all, he pled with me for just a glimpse of the dear unseen face he loved so well—Medusa's face! And how it bruised my heart to seem careless of his love and deny him his right, and yet I did.

'And night by night I dared not sleep, for once I wakened almost screaming, feeling the veil slip slowly from my face. But I awoke and shamed him for seeking to take unawares what I would not willingly grant, shamed him, for he had a noble soul that feared not to confess a wrong; and so he promised, yet for his sake I feared his weakness. So the passionate happiness of the days was darkened by an abiding terror. Never did I press my veiled cheek against his, or kiss his lips through that one thin envious fold, but the serpents coiled about my neck or curling from my brows, reared and stirred upon the scalp, and seemed to hiss Medusa, Medusa, Medusa in my ears.'

‘And one day—oh, my love!—the blossoms were all pink and white in the new greenness of the leaves as I sat in the orchard sheltering from the sun heat. The restless touch about my head was stayed, and I had nursed my fears to sleep with no remembrance but that I was a woman, and was loved, so tranquil and peace-bringing was the day. Drowsily contented I sat, when from the house my darling came swiftly across the grass, and there was that in his eyes which told me that the end was come.

‘For I leaped up screaming, and wound my hands across my head, shuddering as the snakes slipped and quivered, stiffening under the pressure, or, it may be, gifted with a hateful exultance of death to come. But gently, oh so gently, he loosed my fingers and drew my hands down till he held them in one grasp, not harshly, no, my love was never harsh, but firmly and with strength as became a man. And as I bent my head upon my breast I felt the veil lifted softly, reverently, from its place, then there was a hush, and, as if Zeus had willed it, I could not forbear to lift my face and look him in the eyes. An instant, and the horror of it struck me down, and I fell huddled in a heap upon my dead.’

She ceased, and under wide, untrembling

lids looked out into the light, then said, 'This peace frets me. I wish that Zeus were not so tender-hearted.'

And clenching her hands behind her she walked out into the fields, while the grey sisters drew closer together, whispering to one another.

V

FROM observation I am persuaded that, closely as he looks after his sixpences, David might be safely trusted with all the gold of the Rand. But he has his weaknesses, and, like all strong natures, where he is weak he is desperately weak.

A day or two back, I had a brace of birds down from town, and to my great annoyance Joan cooked them both on the one day. You will have gathered that I am a plain-living man, but there is one thing I will not stand, that is a *réchauffé*, and Joan knows it. What is more to the purpose, unfortunately David knows it too.

When I remonstrated with him he shook his head solemnly. 'They were awfu' fine birds, sir, an' I kenned they wadna keep, sae I juist bid Joan pit the twa till the fire.'

‘Not keep, you idiot! they would have kept a month but for your folly. It’s sheer waste; take them away, and never let me see them again.’

‘Ou ay, I’ll dae your bidding, though it’s hard tae be misca’ed oot o’ your name, an’ ye nae fule, for I wasna far oot. Ye’ll find they winna keep, but ye needna fret aboot the waste.’ And he was right; confound him for a villain.

Next day when I remonstrated with him on his rascality, he looked at me mournfully, and said, ‘Dinna blame me, sir. I’m no in fault. It’s juist pure heredity. Reivin’ was aye a failin o’ the Auchtermuchtys, frae the day the first o’ them stayed her wame wi’ an apple at the temptin’ o’ Satan. But it was an awfu’ fine bird ye ken, an’ ower muckle for oreeginal sin.’ May I be preserved in future from originality at fifty pounds a year; it is too expensive a luxury.

I was commenting on this peculiarity of David’s that evening, but It cut me short in a fashion rather trying to the temper.

‘Do you really imagine that you have made a discovery? Surely you must see that you are simply applying to the individual a principle which has existed from the day David’s foremother—why shouldn’t there be

foremothers as well as forefathers? you men claim too much for yourselves—was bribed to theft by a comfortable lie. It is really a case of the conscience price. Strange what a varying market that of conscience is. Strawberry leaves, lawn sleeves, a penn'orth of bread, and a hundred things between, may be quoted in the official list of the moral exchange. Listen and I will tell you the story of a few acres of starved land; we will call it "GLEN-BARAGH" after the Barony.'

Glenbaragh, as all the world knows, is a wild picturesque district in the remote south, or rather south-west, of Ireland, round which nature has thrown, to the north and east, earth-works of such formidable magnitude as to defy the invasion of an iron civilisation. In all directions landwards lie savage mountains and gloomy passes, fencing in a country too poor to tempt even the sharp avidity of Irish land-hunger. Seaward, the unresting Atlantic frets against a bleak and rugged coast; abrupt bare rocks beat stubbornly back the angry waters; and few indeed are the days when the roar of surf may not be heard a full mile inland. Facing landward, the hills rise in a dreary wilderness of tumbled boulders, thinly interspersed with lines of green and russet, as

quagmire, or a narrow stretch of rustling wiry bog-grass, clutch at existence. Above, the boulders disappear, and the barren hills are crowned with coarse-grained granite peaks, weather-beaten to the west into a ghostly white, but black with lichen to the east and north. Depressingly gloomy, and aggressively inhospitable, the marvel is that life, human or animal, could pick up any existence in such a land. But even Glenbaragh had its population; and in the hollows and valleys of the hungry spurs were sheltered small holdings, cleared with infinite care by poverty-stricken generations, who from the sheer conflict with nature had come out victorious, though with but few spoils and not unscathed. The severity of the fight for existence showed itself in dreary hopelessness, and faculties too numbed to grasp such newer problems of civilisation as had penetrated even to the wilds of Glenbaragh. But it must not be supposed that such holdings were numerous. Half a dozen might perhaps cluster in an embayed ravine; then, as the hillside stretched unsheltered to the winds, a mile or two would lie without a break in the lifeless monotony, until a further cleft or projecting headland afforded shelter.

After just such a stretch of wild uncultivated slope came a group of three small farms, poor

enough in soil, and to a farmer from the midlands or north contemptible in extent, but in this desolate region accounted prizes of the highest value; for Glenbaragh, with its meagre, ill-fed population starving in scarcity, judged by a very different standard from that of the prosperous farmer of many deep-soiled well-drained acres. In honest truth these three plots were miserably unproductive and poor, carrying a scanty crop of wet potatoes, too often swept away by disease, or affording a meagre supply of coarse grass to half a dozen sheep and one or two gaunt cows. Yet even this in Glenbaragh was wealth, and consequently Donohoe and the two Sullivans were envied their unapproachable prosperity.

Of these three holdings two were occupied by cousins, both Denis Sullivans, the one, after the odd custom of that district and for distinction's sake, being known as Denis Sullivan Fox, or shortly as Denis Fox. No tribute to his superior intelligence was intended by the affix; it was rather derived from his ruddy complexion and thin red beard.

These holdings of the Sullivans lay to the uppermost or right-hand side of the road; while that of Donohoe was on the left stretching to the water's edge, his house facing the

entrance to Fox's farm. Beyond all these the road took a sudden turn to the right, and vanished behind a mass of boulders. Donohoe's house, a small thatched cottage, as were both the others, overlooked the road ; while the cabins of the Sullivans lay more remote under the shelter of the hill, two or three hundred yards distant from the highway. In addition to these holdings the Sullivan cousins had until lately been joint tenants in a neighbouring turf-bank, which, being the only dry bog in the district, was regarded as a valuable possession. But it had not prospered in their hands, chiefly, it was said, because of Denis Sullivan's shiftless, unthrifty ways ; and the tenants having failed to pay rent for over two years they had been evicted from possession. The same careless lack of energy had told upon Sullivan in his farm holding, insomuch that he had been glad to pay off his most pressing debts by parting with a portion of the land to his more active cousin. Of the three neighbours Donohoe was the least liked ; a man of few words, grave and abrupt in manner, he lacked the easy-going joviality of Sullivan, and the hearty straightforwardness of Fox. Silent, retiring, energetic, he forced to the full the gifts from nature's unwilling hand, and committed the unpardonable sin of

prospering where others failed ; and so it came that Donohoe was the new tenant of the coveted turf-bank.

It was Patsy Quin from Glenbaragh-More who first brought the news of Donohoe's installation. Fox was in the shed behind his cabin piling up the last few turfs remaining from the spoils of the bank, bitterly rancorous over his loss, when the boy dashed in.

'Och, begor, but it's well to take care av them, for not many more ye'll see. We'll all be goin' to Mr. Donohoe wid our hats in our hands,' said he, determined that the story should lose nothing in the telling.

'Don't be botherin' me wid yer chatter. Get out now, like a good boy, before I hurt ye.'

'Sure, Fox, didn't ye hear the news ? Donohoe do be sayin' that he bested you at last, and that he'll never stop till he gets yer bit of a farm here too, bad luck to him for a land-grabber ! And, begor, the cuttin' must be a tidy good thing, for they tell me the ould man laughed out for once in his life.'

Fox straightened himself with a start. 'What's that ye're sayin', boy ? Spake plain, or hould yer tongue for a fool !'

'Plain, is it ?' snapped Patsy, nettled. 'Donohoe has got yer cuttin', ye lazy lout ;

and fool yerself for not houldin' a good thing between yer two hands. Is that plain ?'

For an instant Fox stood staring, his fingers plucking and crumbling the turf he held ; then a change came over his face that awed the boy into silence. Slowly he dropped on his knees and fumbling, at first blindly, then with an awakened purpose, in the turf-heap, he drew an old-fashioned two-barrelled gun from its hiding-place. Lifting it to his lips, he solemnly kissed it on the rusted hammer, and then mumbling to himself, hugged it to his breast as he swayed backwards and forwards, stroking the tubes the while. Then the man's mood changed, and he sprang to his feet gesticulating madly, his dazed eyes rolling in their sockets, and the muscles of his face twitching in the wild excitement.

Frightened at the passion he had evoked, Patsy Quin edged noiselessly to the door, fearful that Fox's mad vengeance would fall upon him, and fled across the face of the hill out of earshot of the stammered curses. But a boy's will is the wind's will, and Patsy's wild pace soon eased down, and as Denis Sullivan's cabin came into view he turned to its door, his soul laden with a double burden. 'God save ye, Denis,' he began more cautiously this time ; 'what's the good news with ye ?'

‘News yourself, Patsy,’ said Denis from his seat on the doorstep. ‘Sure your burstin’ with it.’

‘Och, but it’s no good news I have, but the worst, bad scran to the ould miser! Sure Donohoe has bet Fox this time, an’ Fox is just hoppin’ mad, an’ there’ll be bloody murder afore he’s done. Sure he shook his gun at Donohoe, as if he’d like to go down and break his skull this blessed minute.’

Sullivan took his pipe leisurely from his mouth, and said lazily, ‘Ah, Patsy, you was always a great little fella to talk and say nothin’. What news are ye spakin’ of at all, an’ what has Fox to do wid a gun?’

‘Oh, faith, I’ll tell you soon enough,’ and Patsy moved back a yard or two to give effect to his speech. ‘Sure it’s more shame to you, Denis Sullivan, that black Donohoe has grabbed the turf-bank you and Fox couldn’t hould; an’ there’s news for you.’

The man looked at him a moment in silence, and then said harshly, ‘An’ isn’t he welcome to the ould bank, for all I care? As well him have it as Fox. But what was Fox doin’ wid the gun? It’s some of your lies, I suppose!’

‘A lie!’ said Patsy hotly, coming forward in wrath, and forgetting his weariness. ‘Never

a lie in it! Didn't he take his ould two-bar'l'd gun from under the turf, an' curse Donohoe, an' swear he'd have his life an' be hung for it?"

With a sudden movement Denis gripped the lad by his ragged collar, and rising to his feet looked sternly down at the excited face. Then he spoke slowly and impressively. 'Patsy, my son, ayther ye're dramin', an' if you are ye'd best wake up an' spare breath in tellin' yer drame, or Fox'll cut the life out of you; or if ye're tellin' truth—well, even so keep a quiet tongue in your head, an' don't get a decent man into trouble. God knows there's enough widout your meddlin'. Run away, boy, run away; an' forget you was ever inside a mile of Glenbaragh-Beg this day,' and giving the lad two or three slow shakes he released him and turned into the cottage.

Two nights later the patrol loitering along the Glenbaragh road in the half dusk of twilight was aroused from the lethargy with which it ordinarily made its rounds by two loud reports, either from a rifle or a large-bore shot-gun, following in quick succession, and sounding in the direction of Glenbaragh-Beg, from which the constables were distant something less than half a mile. Five minutes later they were on the scene of a tragedy striking in its dramatic elements.

The sun had set not only behind the hills but into the sea beyond ; the moon had not yet risen, but the sky was cloudless, and the night clear with the lingering of a long twilight. A solitary candle placed upon a chair shone feebly through the open door of Donohoe's cabin, and in the broadening track of light which slowly lost itself in the whiteness of the night, and full in its path, stretched a black shadow huddled up into a shapeless heap, from one end of which a thin dark line crept leisurely lightwards through the dust. Beyond, upon the road, stood a small turf-cart, on the shaft of which Denis Sullivan leaned, peering with white face on the gathered blackness ; while opposite, behind the bars leading to his pasture, Denis the Fox stared stupidly at the gun he was slowly turning over with shaking hands.

Where the light faded into the dust of the road the constables paused, and as they halted Sullivan, rousing himself, cried sharply, 'Up the hill, Fox, you fool, and God forgive you !' With slow vacancy Denis the Fox stared at him for reply ; then across the road into the faint track of light, so dismally divided by that tapering line of blackness drawing ever closer to its open door, and with a cry, half sob, half wail, he turned towards the mountain—too late.

To say that the whole country was stirred



feebley expresses the sensation created. The murder was not only coldly brutal, but, what was rare indeed in agrarian crime, the criminal was taken red-handed. From the Causeway to Cape Clear public opinion agreed for once, and Fox Sullivan went to his trial a doomed man.

The motive? Motive enough! Had not Donohoe ousted him from his holding in the turf-bank, and had not Fox Sullivan sworn revenge, though he died for it? For though Patsy Quin tried to take Denis Sullivan's well-meant advice and keep a silent tongue, yet the police somehow got wind of that scene at the prisoner's cabin ; and so Patsy appeared on the table, and with much inward grief and outward perturbation told the story, telling it, perhaps, with a degree of more heat and a larger emphasis of force than he intended.

Your Crown Prosecutor is very seductive in his methods of extracting evidence, and motive was soon clear enough. Then as to fact. Patsy identified the 'ould two-bar'l'd gun' he had described to Denis Sullivan, and the constables could swear to arresting the prisoner with the still warm weapon in his hands. But the chief interest centred in the evidence of Denis Sullivan as being that of the witness first on the spot after the com-

mittal of the crime. Denis had begged hard to be excused appearing in court. 'Sure ye saw it all yerselves, gintlemen,' he said to the constables. 'I can say no more nor yerselves. An' isn't the man me own cousin, me father's brother's son, that you must go an' make me hang him; sure won't the whole country side howl "informer" an' stone me an' the wife an' the childer? Don' ask me, gintlemen, don' ask me.' Then, when he found the law obdurate, as indeed it had to be, he changed his ground. 'Well, then, mebbe I won't say all ye want o' me; jist let me alone, or ye'll be doin' yerselves a harm.' But here he was pinned on the dilemma that, since he was so anxious to aid the accused and could do the prosecution an injury, justice must put him in the witness-box by force, lest a wrong fall on the prisoner. So with many a muttered and open execration Denis Sullivan took his place on the table.

The wary passage-at-arms between counsel and the witness may be condensed into the admitted narrative of the latter, drawn out of him piece-meal, and after much waste of time. On the morning of the day on which the murder was committed he had started at an early hour to fetch a load of turf from the village of Mucklish, distant some ten miles from Glen-

baragh-Beg, the contents of the load being partly for himself and partly drawn on behalf of the prisoner. And here the witness made no secret that he resented bitterly the loss of the turf-bank, which necessitated a long journey, and heavily increased the cost of the fuel. Questioned as to whether the prisoner was not injured equally with himself, Sullivan hesitated a moment, and said cautiously that Fox was a 'strong man,' and could stand it better than himself. He did not go often to Mucklish, but when he did he made a day of it, so that it was 'on to four or maybe five' when he started home. The road to Mucklish took a sudden turn to the right just beyond Donohoe's cabin, was up-hill, and with high land on either side, shutting out the straight stretch towards the village which lay along the hillside. It was dusk when he neared this bend on the road, not black dark, but sun-down with a flush of twilight in the sky, darker under the hill than most places because the hill lay to the west, but clear enough to know a man four or five perches away. As he reached the top of the hill beyond the bend he heard a shot close at hand, then another, and for a minute he pulled up his cart and listened, but heard nothing further; then jumping off his cart he led the pony round the bend till he got near

to Donohoe's cottage, when he saw the door open and light streaming out, with something lying across the whiteness, he didn't know what, till he heard a stir on the opposite side of the road.

Here he stopped in his story, and shooting a glance at Fox broke out, 'I won't, then, I won't ; ye may hang me if ye like, but I'm no informer, an' the man me own cousin. Divil a word more I'll say, good or bad.' And he sank back in a shrunk heap in the chair, fluttering his open hands in front of his ashen face.

'What did you see at Fox's bars ? What made the stir you heard ?'

'Nothin', I'll tell ye no more.'

Again the question was pressed, only to be met with the same dogged refusal.

'Was it Denis the Fox you saw standing at the bars ? Answer now on your oath, Sullivan ; was it Denis the Fox with the gun in his hand ?'

But Sullivan, dropping his head on his open palms, rocked to and fro in the chair, crooning and moaning to himself, and answering never a word.

Then the judge intervened. 'The constables have sworn to the prisoner ; what more do you want ? Must you press the question on this poor man ?'

‘Very well, my lord. Now, Sullivan, what did you say to Fox when you saw him at the bars with the gun in his hand?’

‘What did I say? I said—is it to Fox, ye mane, sir? Sure I never swore Fox was there at all, and never another word ye’ll get; there’s my oath to that, anyway. I know yer tricks, an’ I can hould me tongue wid any man.’ Nor could questions or threats draw another word, till at last, ‘I think, Mr. Attorney,’ said the judge, ‘the witness may go down.’

Then Sullivan sprang to his feet with an energy which sent the heavy chair crashing backward on the table, and raising his hands he cried as he shook them wildly in the air, ‘He’s an innocent man, my lord; I swear it by Holy Mary, I swear it by the Cross; an innocent man, an innocent man!’ And his voice broke from its shrill pitch into a hoarse sob as, with outstretched hands still clutching upward, he stumbled from the witness-table, pausing at the bar, where he gripped the prisoner by both shoulders, kissing him convulsively on the lips. Then he cried again, ‘An innocent man; sure I did the best I could, Fox, I did the best I could.’ His hands dropped fumbling down the seams of Fox’s coat, the excitement faded from his face, and it was with the feeble gait of an

old man that he passed slowly out of the court-house.

Perhaps of all present the prisoner was the least moved by the painful scene. His eyes kindled at Sullivan's outburst, and he drew himself together with a certain pride and dignity as though his manhood was touched by the passionate cry; and as his cousin passed falteringly through the door he called out, 'Good-bye, Denis; sure ye tould the truth, and what could man do more?' But the crowd was deeply stirred, and a long breath seemed to pass over the range of packed benches as the counsel for the defence carried the proceedings back to dulness.

They had come to see a fellow-man struggle to thrust back the opening gates of death, and fail, and they were not disappointed of the sensation.

Defence there was none beyond a theory. So there is but little wonder, even considering the solemn issues involved, that ten minutes sufficed in which to find a verdict, and then Fox Sullivan stepped to the front, while every curious face was turned towards him.

He stood gripping the bar with both hands, while his white face looked straight before him at the scarlet curtains and dusty canopy. 'Innocent, my lord! The gintleman that spoke for me tould ye true, an' God be

good to him for it. I can't spake much, my lord, me tongue not bein' used to it, an' me mouth so dry ; but I know what ye'll be sayin', sir, an' may God deal so with me in His judgment as I have dealt with Larry Donohoe ; and the curse of the Four Angels on the black scoundrel that killed him.'

A month later the Glenbaragh murder was buried with Fox Sullivan under the gallows in the county prison. After the trial Denis Sullivan returned to his cottage, and resumed his normal life of uneventful labour, though it was noted that the shock of that autumn night scene, and the terrible pathos of the final public act in the drama, had preyed upon his spirits. He was no longer light-hearted and genial as in the past, but morose and sullen. Slowly but steadily he drifted apart from his neighbours. The grim asceticism of Donohoe seemed to have fallen upon him, and, unless when driven by absolutely sheer necessity, he never quitted his little holding.

The immediate result of this was the gradual improvement in his condition. New land was wrested from the iron grasp of nature. Fair crops took the place of the barren rock-strewn hills ; and in time he even recovered possession of the coveted turf-bank. But for all his good fortune, his gloom never lightened, and as the

generation which had known the Denis Sullivan of younger days passed away, there were few left to speak a kindly word for him.

By laborious toil he had widened the borders of the turf-bank, and was seeking to reclaim from the hill-side a still larger extent, when in one of his blasting operations a boulder was shaken from the heights above. Intent upon his work, he gave no heed to the roar and crash of splintered rock as it tore its headlong way towards the sea, until escape was impossible. Nor when aware of the danger did he do more than draw himself to his height and stand facing it. Down it leaped from rock to rock, dragging behind it a thundering cascade of stony wreck, and thrusting aside a crushed mass of humanity which had been known as Denis Sullivan.

Very tenderly they carried him down the hill; but the movement over the rough ground shook him back to consciousness, and he gasped out, 'Lave me down, boys; it's the praste I want, an' ye'd better be quick while the life's in me. Lave me down; sure ye hurt me terrible.'

So they laid him on the grass by Fox's bars, propping up the palsied head against the soft moss on the clay wall. Already he seemed dead to the neck, but there was life in the piteous eyes, and a trembling existence still flickered about the white lips.

‘Will ye hurry, boys, or I’ll die before me time?’ Then the eyes wandered round. ‘Fox’s bars, by God! Is Donohoe beyant in the gloomin’? Fox’s bars, Fox’s bars! Is the praste never coming?’

Soon it became clear that no priest would hear Denis Sullivan’s last confession, and smooth away the fears of his troubled life.

‘It’s growin’ cowld I am, an’ the life in me,’ he whispered. ‘Stand back, all of ye, except the sarjint there. Closer, sarjint dear, whisper now.’ A light flashed into his eyes. ‘It was I shot Donohoe, an’ curse him for a land-grabber, and Denis the Fox for another, for didn’t he take my bit of a holdin’? Sure it was fine, the wan and the other wid a pull o’ the trigger;’ and a gleam of humour that was almost a laugh lit up the ghastly face. ‘I stole Fox’s gun that mornin’ and dropped it at the bars, just where I’m lyin’, when I heard him tearing down the hill—both wid wan stroke, sarjint.’ Slowly his head rolled round in its weakness. ‘Is Donohoe beyant, or is it the shadda’ o’ Fox that’s fallin’ across me? The praste—I’m—thinkin’—the praste—wouldn’t have—given me——’

‘Dead!’ said the sergeant, rising on his knees. ‘Dead and damned; and a good job, too!’

‘It seems curious to me,’ I said, ‘how fond you are of going to a damp country like Ireland for your subjects.’

‘Ah!’ It answered airily; ‘the natural affinity of spirits for water, I suppose.’

VI

IT must have been some weeks later that I said to It, ‘There are several things which strike me as strange; may I mention them?’ ‘Thank you.’ ‘Well then, take “Glenbaragh,” “John Scott’s Wife,” “A Translation,” and sundry other stories you have told me. They cover a series of months, or even years. How came you to follow them out; was it not a tedious business waiting the developments?’

‘Find your answer in analogy,’ It replied. ‘How did a Lyall, a Dawson, an Agassiz, a Humboldt read the story of the world? Would you have them conscious of only what passed before their eyes, the infinitely small of a little life? No. The multiform hieroglyphs of time graven on the eternal rocks, stencilled in the delicate tracery of the coal layers, stamped in the sinuous curves of the rippled sand, were a book wherein thought might follow line by line the revelations of creation.

‘So with you, and as with you, so with all.

The history of the years writes itself in indelible characters on face, word, and act ; and the book is none so hard to read. The fiercer passions —hate, greed, ambition and the like—bite the deeper, as acid into steel, or the grinding stylus of the glacial age ploughing the surface of the primal granite. But of all the story is clear, and needs but a translation into common words that all may read.

‘ In as brief a space as speech can be compressed into, your history may be told from gesture, facial lines, inflection of voice and the like. Shall I tell you the story of yourself ?

‘ What period will you have ? the tale of that financial crisis which scored those wrinkles on your forehead ? or of these sadder days that wrote the lines which gather round your mouth ? Why the hair has grown so grey about the temples ? or why, in spite of all the past, some laughter lingers still behind your eyes ? The age of volcanic passion, the age of the slow grinding of the world, the age which has decked your life with something of loveliness and blessing. Which ? The building up of a man’s life, and the building up of a world, are alike open books where patience and thought may read strange truths ; and do you note how they follow the same natural law, heat, solidity, beauty ? ’

But I shook my head. 'No story of self, if you please. That which leaves its mark upon us is best forgotten. There are but few, I think, who care to see their natural face in the glass; the desire is rather to forget what manner of men we were. To come back to yourself. There are long intervals between your visits here; are there those whom you favour equally with myself, and to whom you perhaps tell the "Story of an Average Man"? Not a pleasant thought that, by the way.'

'You forget,' It said gently; 'there were also the genius and the imbecile, but classification is usually unpleasant to the thing classified. No protozoon likes to be called a protozoon, it apes the mammal.'

'As for the where,' It went on, 'there are many places, for though the world is small the universe is wide. What do you say to the star whose light is but a pinpoint on the sensitive plate of the astronomer? or, to come nearer, that mysterious place hopeless to your keenest telescopes, the other side of the moon? Banter, you say; no, not altogether, since these are within the circuit of possibilities. But seriously, the resting-place I love the best is just beyond you, there where all souls meet.'

'Have you never felt that somewhere there was a common ground where all, the humble

and the proud, the foolish and the wise, the ambitious and the meek, the pure and the criminal, could meet with pride, wisdom, folly, ambition, sin forgotten ; dropped from them like a garment ; leaving behind nothing but the simple, unwarped, untainted soul as God gave it ?

‘Think of the splendour of these hours, when Shakespeare and Cervantes, in the flush of their vigour, held communion with the still riper manhood of Spenser and Raleigh, and listened to the almost inexhaustible experience of half-maddened, war-worn Tasso. Or put the clock back three-quarters of a century, and catch if you can the echoes as the four great masters laid bare all that was best and noblest in the realms of art :—St. John-like Raphael, in his perpetual youth, “the divine” in word and look ; Titian scarcely more than dreaming as yet of his glories of abiding colour ; Leonardo, feeble and world-worn, but with the fire still in his heart ; Michael Angelo, or, as one might say, in all reverence, Michael the archangel of God’s handiwork amongst men. What hours they were, and what a place that is where the jealousies that canker and enfeeble even the greatest are forgotten and set at rest. A place of union and of compensation ; where the miser forgets his

gold, the arrogant his pride, the poor their pinch of misery, the autocrat his power, the slave his servitude, and the rogue his sin; where sorrow and suffering sink into oblivion, where the crafty, selfish struggle, whether of men or nations, is blotted out, and in its place reigns peace; and from one to the other is the unfettered communion of spirits as pure as when they came new-born from the purposes of God.

‘A final goal that, you say? But no, the burdens are laid down for only a brief moment, and as for each the world whirls on into daylight again, the load must be lifted and borne on another day’s journey towards the end.’

‘Then,’ I said, ‘your power reaches into sleep?’

‘Into dreams at least,’ It answered. ‘Judge of to-night and tell me when we next meet.’

Had the windows not been securely shuttered I would have sworn that a breath, with the strength of the pine-woods in it, passed across my face as It faded into vacancy.

As usual I put out the lights without calling for David, took my candle, and locking the door behind me turned across the hall. As I moved, shadows started from every angle, crowding and thronging upon me. Up the stairs and down the long corridor the flickering

procession followed, swelling into a multitude of soundless forms. Once in my room the lights kept them at bay, only to have their noiseless tumult filling the later darkness.

Confound It and Its dreams ; how may a man dream if he cannot sleep, and how may a man sleep when he is plucked and pinched by goblin hands, and his hair stirred upon his head by goblin breath ? Was that sudden stroke one or half-past ? How loud, how insistent it was, and hollow as the stroke of doom ! Was it one hour, or two, or three, I had borne this body of a slaughtered sleep ?

Macbeth hath murdered sleep, the innocent sleep. What was that last story It told ? Glenbaragh with the thread of Donohoe's blood lying across the light ; blood—Donohoe's blood—blood ; and so I slept.

Darkness, and through the darkness the noise of a tempest, the moaning of winds, the sullen roar, as of waters and the drift of heavy rain. Through the darkness one stooped down and lifted me up, and my hands and face were washed with the rain, and they were red.

We stood on the edge of a vast hollow, and the hollow was filled with blood. On the farther edge granite peaks rose up into the darkness, now storm-swept and now aglow with a light which came whence no man knew.

Down these peaks trickled innumerable thin rivulets, threads of crimson, bare veins on the bare bones of a grey world, steadily adding to the vastness of the crimson sea.

From the red mud of the margin tiny crimson streams oozed up from the mist-brooded, reeking morass of the lower sedges. These, too, sluggishly emptied themselves into the central sea. Blood from below, blood from above, meeting and commingling in a restless flood. Backwards and forwards, restless, aimless, without a purpose but to shift and change, the red waves beat one against the other, each breaking down the other's strength and energy, flinging up their bloody froth and scum a brief moment, then falling back, exhausted.

Suddenly there was a fiercer jar and warfare of the flood; stress, turmoil, and anguish; a travail as of birth, and from its centre, where ooze and rivulet were blent to the fullest, one rose up from the tumult, and there was a calm.

About her head was bound a white fillet crowned with olive leaves. From her shoulders to her feet swept a white garment splashed about the skirt with blood, and a red mire was on her sandals, but her hands were stainless.

Then the multitude which thronged the cliffs, and trampled upon one another by thousands in the red morass, shouted an acclamation which

shivered the darkness from the sky ; and from the zenith light poured in upon the world. Depth called to height, and height echoed back to depth, and the tempest ceased.

This way and that she looked, the shining of her eyes resting now on the granite peaks, now on the recesses of the red morass ; but neither the splash of the rivulets nor the flow of the ooze was stayed, and though there was a calm, it was the peace that lies in the centre of a hurricane, when the wind rests its wings to gain strength for greater buffetings.

Presently the moaning of the tempest spoke out afresh. Then the trickle of the streams grew into a flood, and the ooze from the morass swelled into a river, and these joining together rose up, mounting higher as I watched. Gathering power from the combination of sources they swept the figure headlong back into the sea of blood. Then again there came from the face of the rocks, and from the heaving, festering, crimson mire, a wild cry of triumph, hoarser than before, and the thin streams trickled, and the red mud oozed and bubbled as it had at the first.

Then the one who stood by me said, 'It will not always be so, but the time of understanding is not yet, for liberty is still born of blood, and by blood is she overthrown.'

Again there was darkness everywhere, or such a darkness as comes an hour before the dawn, but as then, so now behind the farther peaks a light was set.

Then I said to the one who was by me, 'The world cannot live in such darkness ; it is stagnation and death.' But he answered, 'Not so ; in darkness men move cautiously, and for those who climb there is light enough, and each step is nearer to it.' 'But,' I cried, 'is it enough ?' and he answered me, 'Yes, for the time ; wait.'

And as I waited, a man journeyed from the one horizon to the other, stooping as he walked to pluck here a flower and there a fruit, for all his path was bordered by one or other ; until his hands were dyed red with the crimson of the one, and his mouth stained by the juices of the other. And he plucked and ate, and plucked and ate, and was unhappy in his gross abundance.

Then one met him, and when the man saw him he looked upon the shame of his hands, and would have hid them, but the other, gripping them, held them fast, and stooping kissed the soiled mouth. And at the touch and kiss the ruddy hands and upturned face were cleansed ; and the man went on his way, his arms full of pure flowers held to his breast.

Then I saw that one of these fell, and the man trampled upon it, but stooping took it back again to his heart. Then another fell to the ground, and his feet crushed it, and he passed on unheeding. Then a third slipped from his arms, and the man plucked in its place a blood-red flower from the mire of the wayside, and hid it in the blossoms which he held to his heart, covering it out of sight. But they faded and grew heavy, so heavy that, swaying to and fro with the burden, the man fell prone to the ground and lay grovelling ; and when he rose his hands were dyed crimson to the wrists, and his mouth was stained black with the foul juices of the fruits.

Then I cried to the one beside me, 'How could he ? When that other had kissed his mouth !'

And the answer was given to me, 'Because he is a man.'

After that I saw flowers, flowers everywhere. The first budding of the year into beauty of life. Drifts of snowdrops, daffodils, wild hyacinths, and in the warm air there was the smell of violets.

Up the slow ascent of the fields a woman took her way, a tiny creature of her kind upon her breast, his little arms fast around her neck

and his cheek warm against hers. And in spite of burden and hill the light danced in the woman's eyes as her lips fondled the soft neck of the boy.

Then I said to the one who was by me, 'This is common nature, there is no wonder here ;' and I was answered : ' Is there no wonder ?—wait.'

Then I saw that the way had changed. The flowers were poor and scattered, while sharp stones, mingling with them, bruised her feet. The boy was no longer in her arms, but wandered in the smooth and grassy places, followed always by the watchfulness of her eyes. But she was none the less burdened ; for on her shoulders lay a heavy weight to which she added morsel by morsel ; and I could see by the upward glance of her eyes that it was for him she toiled amongst the stones, while he, plucking the flowers in pleasant places, heeded her not at all, but rather looked out to the line of sky which lay before.

Then I saw he had grown strong enough to bear the burden, but that, in spite of his strength, it still lay across her shoulders. Presently they drew near to a deep and swift river ; above which, on the hither side in front of them, a steep bank was reared, and beyond

and on the margin of the river lay shivering sands. And the burden was heavy upon her, but as she looked at the boy, grown a man, her eyes glowed, and the pain was lightened.

And now, by reason of her weariness and the steepness of the bank, the woman stumbled and fell, and the burden rolled beside her, glittering through a rent in its side, and the quicksand crept upon her and it. Then I heard the sound of rushing feet, and the man hastened from behind and stooped. As he stooped the woman's eyes shone as at the first, the lines of pain and heart-hunger were smoothed from her face, and her mouth trembled.

Then he set his knee upon her breast, thrusting her into the sand, the better to reach the burden which he gripped in his arms, and straining it fast, rose, striding on with it into the water, and the woman, breast deep, turned her head and watched.

The sand and slime were over her body now, sucking her in; but the brief agony of a moment had passed from her face, and the tender look grew into her eyes again, and she watched, and as she watched the sand crept up. As for the man he was waist deep, and half across the river now, hugging his burden with never a look behind. And the sand crept over

the quivering mouth and quenched the light of the eyes, but their love never changed ; and the man strode out of the river at the other side and passed on, the woman dead behind him.

Then said the one who was by me, 'Was there no mystery ?' and I answered, 'Yes, there were two.'

VII

IF it was late when I fell asleep it was shamelessly early when I awoke, unable to sleep again, and I said, 'If these be Its dreams, then the iron has indeed entered deep into Its soul, for no energetic nightmare could be more aggressive. Dream me no more dreams ; and as for Its types, my faith in human nature is broader and deeper than these would warrant.'

Later in the day, much later, fourteen or fifteen hours at the least—and weary long hours they were at the first—I repeated the opinion, adding, 'All your types are in scarlet and black, like some Mephistopheles of melodrama ; are there no high lights in the picture of life ?'

'What a poet has written——'

‘Your poet?’ I interrupted rudely, for the remark appeared irrelevant.

‘My poet? No, but the world’s; since for all his rough exterior he was the poet of all true nature, human or divine, and a giant among men. Else had he never rhymed “more,” “war,” and “poor”; “seas” and “fleece”; “boughs” and “house,” in the one poem, and then with a splendid audacity called it a Boston Hymn. He was a solemnly earnest man; he knew too much of the working of men’s hearts not to be terribly in earnest; but surely here was a touch of grim humour. But to go on; what a poet has written of “Compensation” is true of life.

The wings of Time are black and white,
Pied with darkness and with light.

‘And as with Time, so with life; the darkness is original and normal, the light later and supernatural. High lights? I will give you a picture with some presently, but small wonder if in the most cases the normal predominates.

‘Why sneer at my verse-maker? Is it that, like most, you prefer talking poetry to reading it, as thereby the air of culture is more cheaply earned? Or is it that it is not poetry? Perhaps you are right: I am not an analyst. Let

us call it verse, and so descending to a lower level be content.

‘What do you think of the old-fashioned forms? For myself, having watched by their cradle I have almost a nurse’s love for them, and so am perhaps prejudiced. Here is my verse-maker’s opinion in a “ROUNDEL.”’

Like well-tried friends old forms are best ;
For each to life its music lends ;
And one and all have stood Time’s test,
Like well-tried friends.

And to our changing mood each bends ;
Careless, gay in wit or jest,
Or grave before life’s sterner ends.
And, sometimes, let it be confessed,
To other thoughts their music tends,
And whispers love with anxious quest,
Like well-tried friends.

‘What forms?’ said I ; ‘for my recollection of old forms is of something rather stiff and hard.’

‘Your recollection seems to be clear enough,’ It replied ; ‘for as you treated those, so you treat these. You sit upon them. But here you have your answer in a “TRIOLET.”’

Villanelle
And Triplet :
Rondeau, Roundel, Kyrielle,
Villanelle !

The rhythmic chiming of a bell
 To quaint recurrent music set :
 Villanelle
 And Triolet.

‘ Though the list is by no means exhausted,
 as I will show you if you have the patience
 to listen to, say, a ballade. Here is one of
 “ AMARYLLIS.” ’

Who wills may win the world’s renown,
 He draws no jealous thought from me.
 No hooded robe, no laurel crown,
 No plutocrat satiety,
 No triumph wrought by land or sea,
 Where war’s successful game is played,
 Can move desire ; I’d rather be
 With Amaryllis in the shade !

The pomps and vanities of town
 I value not a pin-point’s fee :
 The world may smile, the world may frown,
 May ban me with its cold decree,
 If but the one essential she
 Who rules my camp, my court, my glade,
 Be present, and I wander free
 With Amaryllis in the shade !

You, madam, in your silken gown
 Where gems and gauds so well agree,
 Perchance in sweeping scorn look down
 On dainty lace and dimity ?
 Yet there love finds its perigee,
 And gems and gauds are lightly weighed,
 If only I may urge my plea
 With Amaryllis in the shade !

My blessings on this spreading tree !
For lovers were its branches made,
Though sunny hours too quickly flee
With Amaryllis in the shade !

‘That you should be partial to a shade,’
said I, ‘was to be expected ; and naturally
forms are also rather in your line. For myself
I prefer a substance.’

‘Then have your will. Leave the older
fashion behind, and in punishment for your
bad taste listen to the rhyme of “AN ETRUSCAN
VASE.”’

What filled your gracious amplitude
When you, in all your browns and reds,
Reflected first your potter’s mood
In such a wealth of antique heads ?

If drunken Bacchus, purple-crowned
From bursting clusters, speaks the truth,
Anacreontics must have drowned
The voice of Pallas in your youth !

And your red lips must oftentimes
Have taken on a ruddier glow
From stout wine cooled in mountain rimes
Then tipped to copious overflow !

And yet, the bird of wisdom lurks
As sage and dull behind his back,
As if in your time, too, the works
Of wisdom trod in folly’s track !

But that, perchance, was just because
Minerva’s too severe an air

Had made it prove our nature's laws
And find its comfort otherwhere.

For in your time, old Vase, I think
The wit to drive with loosened rein,
Or rather, not to fill with ink
The pulse and throb of Nature's vein,

Was sometimes lacking. Well, our days
Are older by two thousand years,
And we have learned our wiser ways
By twenty centuries of tears.

But further on, and round the curve
That swells beneath the drooping lip,
Whose hollowed channel well would serve
To tempt a thirsty stolen sip :

Grave Ceres with long sheaves of corn
Caught in her arms, and by her side
A sickle like a moon new-born
Peers out, as if she sought the bride

Whom Pluto, on that April day
Which saw Narcissus' yearly birth,
In such unloverlike a way
Had ravished from the wounded earth.

And so, it may be, grains of gold
Brought in the secret underworld
By miracles of forty-fold,
Within your ample lap have curled.

And you have heard the *thrip*, and *thrip*
Of flails, on wheat sheaves underspread ;
And felt the busy housewife dip
Her arms deep in, for daily bread.

More worthy this than that, and yet
Methinks that Bacchus pouts his mouth,
As if to say, men were not set
Too sternly, in those days, on drowth !

But ate their bread, and drank their wine,
And grew on both to might of limb,
And held them each alike divine,
The gift of Ceres or of him.

So, was it wheat ? But as we turn
Your bosom round, a fluttering dove
Not given, in your days, to earn
From grain alone its life of love,

Slow herald of an airy tread,
Flies out across your glowing sky ;
With drooping wing and backturned head
To mark the goddess drawing nigh !

So, ancient friend ! Not wine, nor wheat
Were your full measure those old days !
But rose-leaves of Olympian heat
That breaks too often to a blaze !

Ah me, ah me ! how year to year,
And age to age repeats the tale !
The world may palsy ; still we hear
The echoes of its youth prevail !

For Venus now was Venus then,
Recurrent harvest of our soil ;
Long lingering in the hearts of men,
Past heats of wine or fruits of toil.

And rose-leaf odours of the south
Well up from out your brown abyss ;
Like full caresses of a mouth
Too pure to shun a lover's kiss.

I hold you dearer for the thought.
For corn and wine are well enough ;
But, when the feet of life are brought
Through darkened ways and pathways rough,

Then all false comforts shrivel up,
Though born of all the spoils of earth,
With every vintage in the cup
That sets the edge on empty mirth,

And love alone sustains its charms ;
And peace comes with it in the touch
Of trustful lips, and nursing arms,
And heart-beats telling overmuch.

And so, old Vase, the world is young,
For all your thousand years have taught ;
And sings the song your potter sung
When love lay hid behind his thought.

‘Your poet was right,’ I cried, as It finished.
‘Old forms are best, much the best ; they are
shortest.’

‘So be it,’ It answered. ‘Some other night
I shall take you at your word, since you have
not yet tasted the flavour of the Kyrielle,
Villanelle, Rondel, or Rondeau. How pleased
you will be !

‘Meantime I must redeem my promise of the
high lights. The story might be called, “All
that a man hath will he give for his life : and
a woman for her husband” ; but the title would
be cumbersome, so I will shorten it to, “WITH
BEASTS AT EPHESUS.”’

It may be that in some respects this story is not quite accurate. To get at the undoubted and undeniable truth of things is no easy matter, in the face of such a malignant and undying antagonism as exists in Russia.

On the one hand, there is every inducement to suppress unpalatable facts, since ignorance spells contentment; on the other, there is the inevitable exaggeration fostered, almost compelled, by a bitter and never absent sense of grinding oppression; and between these two the truth is distorted.

But the story is not impossible, for the devil's grip on human nature is at least as strong in Russia as elsewhere; and it is a necessity, from the vast size of the country, that the remoter districts must be more or less subject to the capricious compulsion of evil at the sway of irresponsible men, the official effect of public opinion being more feeble. Once let the point be reached where the local governing body is itself public opinion, its own critic and its own judge, and all things are possible.

When Marie Erdmann married Paul Blatoff there were many who shook their heads, and said she was brewing bitter malt for a life's drinking. It was not that Paul lacked the qualities which compel affection, or that Marie was not the very soul of his daily life; but no

man can be a journalist in even the more moderate section of advanced Russian thought, and promise his wife peace and protection. So, month by month, for over three years her friends stood between them, until at last the tumult of national passion having sobbed itself to sleep, though to but a troubled rest at the best, the lovers spoke out their minds roundly.

Their eyes were open, they saw the shadows thrown upon the mists which hid the future, and knew they fell not from the past, but from the angry days to come ; but it would be easier, they argued in lovers' fashion, to face these days together than apart. So, in spite of greyer years with its warnings, Marie linked herself and her future to the scarcely doubtful fate of Paul the suspect.

‘What difference does it make?’ she said ; ‘except that I have the right to be near him. Do you think that if he were sent “down” that I would stay behind, wife or no wife? I am Paul’s and Paul is mine.’ And so they were married.

Possibly their happiness was not much added to. He was thirty-eight and she thirty ; and for natures that have lived at bay to destruction for so many years there is very little delirium. But their contentment was great, and there were no children, which was a gain.

Two or three years passed for them quietly enough, then came that tragedy by the Ekatерински Canal which threw the official empire into a frenzy of fear.

Following the murder of the Emperor came a reign of terror both in the camp of the Government and the camp of the disaffected. Fear of assassination on the one side, and on the other wild parodies of justice seeking in all directions a blind vengeance. Small wonder that one of the many casts of the net enmeshed Paul, for in those days to be suspected was to be arrested, and to be arrested, condemned. The only question was the punishment — the gallows, Schlüsselburg, or exile.

Unfortunately for Paul, the judicial butchery had been too wholesale for suppression, and foreign opinion preached that mercy which the national fatherhood of the Czar had forgotten. The zeal for blood cooled down, and Paul, being guiltless, was dealt with tenderly. Instead of being sent out to make one of a morning's battue, he was simply condemned to the mines for life.

It was Groska who told me this story, but while I can produce something of his words, I cannot give you the passion which shook his morose sullenness from its phlegm into an irruption of fiery wrath, as he flung himself up and down the room.

Do you understand, my friend? The mines—the mines! Wrist, waist, and ankle linked together down a thousand feet in the bowels of the earth, never more to see light. Herded with the vilest scum of the vilest nation upon earth, thieves, forgers, parricides, villains filthy within and without. A beast of burden, a dog to be kicked by many masters, thrust away and forgotten until the rank foul vapours eat into your bones, while you drop to pieces joint by joint, and still toil under the lash until you die! That is the mines—the mines! Oh! let us thank God for the mercy of the Czar.

Of course, as I say, that was Groska. A man whose father and only sister have been swallowed up will hardly be unprejudiced.

It was months, and much money was spent before Marie could even find out where Paul had been deported. Information, you understand, is high-priced in Russia, and roubles were not plentiful.

When she did learn the truth it nearly broke her heart, but left her courage undaunted; for if there be many circles in the Hell of Siberia, Paul was thrust into very Dis itself. Just where, is no matter; there were others there besides Paul, and on some things silence is best.

Then came more bribery, more besieging

of little great men's cabinets, more heartsickness and delay, so that again months had passed before she obtained the gracious permission to be an exile too—not, of course, into the mines, but to be even a thousand feet above Paul's head seemed to bring them nearer in hope and comfort.

This is not a story of Siberian travel. You can for yourself picture her progress, for every mile of the thousands a prey to the suspicions and rapacity of petty officials, scorned as an outcast, derided, bullied, running the gauntlet of every foul contamination to body and soul; enduring, with the necessary unmurmuring patience, every hardship and wanton insult. The weeks of agony to flesh and blood were slowly drawn to months before she reached the place where her heart lay, but their end came at the last.

The parcel of parti-coloured cottages had been visible since mid-day, but night was drawing in before her telega crawled between the straggling rows of log-built huts which housed the Free Command, where Marie was domiciled, and one other night in the *étaupe* had to be linked on to the long chain of horrors already endured, before she was free, under police sanction, to seek a lodging of her own.

That period of uncertainty was the sorest

trial of her many sorrows. The very proximity to Paul was an agony. The ramifications of the mines ran in many directions, and her tortured, half-maddened imagination pictured him as wearing his life to tatters under her very feet. It was a night of anguish, of prayer, and much weeping.

Slowly the belated light crept in, and its first greyness found her drawn fast against the bars of her window, her mind capable of nothing but the thought that Paul was near.

Her heart sank as the dismal sordid landscape dawned into view. What little snow had fallen was trampled into the thick filth of the street, more repulsive by contrast with the circle of white beyond.

From her window the village strayed, first to right, then to left, in a hopeless, helpless fashion, mean and cringing, a type of the crushed unfortunates who miscalled it home. Beyond, and up a slope, was a huge stockade, and the flutter of her heart choked her as she recognised the prison, within the compass of whose walls was sunk the shaft where Paul was buried. Twenty to thirty feet high the timbers loomed into the light, a stern quadrangle. At the farther side, topping the stockade with its roof, was the prison proper, its full grimness and melancholy hidden by the nearer

wall of logs. Beyond all these a dreary wilderness of snow stretched into the mists of morning. From every point but one a melancholy prospect ; but there was Paul—and Paul was life and hope and love.

The petty degrading formalities of the police were no novelty, but it was a new sensation to look round the smallest of bare rooms and be able to call it home. If only Paul could share it with her ! Miseries were forgotten in the thought, and a buoyant hope sprang up, with such a promise of reality, that she sang as she laid out the simple treasures of her household, all of them sweet with the memories of Paul's touch, with the association of Paul's presence. Then the silence surged in upon her ; the song broke into a sob, and she fell on her knees in a storm of prayer mingled with weeping—Paul ! Paul ! oh, my love ! Paul, my love, my love ! Surely the God of vengeance will hear—some day.

Which prison and which mines ? you ask. That, my friend, it is not wise to say ; the devil is not done with Siberia yet, and he needs no prompting. As I have said, we will name no names ; there are times when man's vengeance seems to fall quicker than God's, but it falls upon the innocent.

The weary, weary sieges she had laid to

officials in St. Petersburg and elsewhere had taught Marie that there was but little to be gained by haste, and much might be lost. The first few days were therefore passed in making inquiry amongst her fellows of the Free Command, with this result.

He whom we will call Dmitri Isanban was governor, and no despot's sway was more autocratic. The Little Father himself was less an absolute monarch than Dmitri Isanban. Give a coarse-grained savage, afflicted with a passion for drink, unlimited power, and what happens? ask your imagination, and let it answer. The shaft pits of the mine are dumb mouths, and the seven spirits, more wicked than their master, know how to keep the secrets of the prison house. Being despotic he was amenable to influence, and for a bribe in the hand any exile might slip between the huge doors into the stockade, but never out again. It was the cave of the fable; the footprints all pointed the one way, but the maw of the beast was never satisfied; he or she who chose to pay might rot and welcome, but the doors never swung outward.

Paul? Yes, news of his coming had preceded him, penetrating even there; and there were several who had seen the tall chained figure shuffle through the village and between

the dismal doors which shut him out from life. Since then—nothing. Other floating morsels of information Marie gathered, but on the whole her harvest was scanty, and as she braced herself up to face the future, the prospect stared her into despair. But this was only at the first, then came the rally of nature, or rather of hope. Dmitri Isanban must be seen, that was plainly the initial step. All expectation of bringing Paul to life had long since left her; now her one object was to purchase entrance within the gates whose clang had been the knell of so many souls. Bribes she had none, every resource had been dried up by official expenses, or, plainly, corruption. All that remained was the daily pittance, in itself insufficient to keep a healthy soul in a sound body. But Marie had faith—therefore Dmitri Isanban must be seen.

It may be supposed that Marie had brought but little of finery with her on her long journey; but two things, feminine instinct and experience, warned her to throw away no card in the game. So the tears were dried from the cheeks, the lines of care softened so far as sorrowful habit would allow, and the figure which daintily picked its way to the governor's door contrasted strangely with its dreary setting.

Dmitri Isanban? Yes, the governor was in

and would see madam no doubt; he mostly did see pretty women; and the flush that surged to Marie's cheeks was all that was needed to complete the picture.

The broad face and thick lips, swarthy countenance and black eyes bore testimony to the mixture of race, and truly; for Dmitri Isanban was both Cossack and Israelite, the inheritor of the avarice and passions of two races, the depths of whose worst possibilities have never yet been plumbed. Promptly Marie came to her point. Paul Blatoff?—ah, such an one might be in the mines, what then? admission! Madam was mad to talk of such a thing, it was destruction. The Free Command could ill afford to lose so bright an ornament. Compliments! no, on his conscience no such thing—and for twenty minutes there was a wary fence. Then, knowing that official delicacy takes no offence in secret, Marie boldly regretted how impossible it would be for her to testify her gratitude except in words. She would give her life for her husband, if love had sacrifices there were none she would not make to die with him. Think what he had suffered, what she had borne. And now one word from him, the governor, one word; and the sorrow was forgotten, the sacrifice ended. Oh! a man must be great indeed who had such power for

happiness in his word. Their prayers, their blessings were his—ah! God in heaven, would he not listen, would he not do this little thing? Yes, she saw his heart in his face, he would be great and gracious and generous. And Marie flung herself before him and gripped his knees in the wild fervour of her pleading.

The governor lay back in his chair, one hand crooked into his beard, the other nursing his elbow. Do you know this thing you ask is against the law?—oh! but I am the law, you say—true, true, I am the law; that is good, I must remember that; but I am not the law for nothing, law is costly, and nowhere more costly than in Siberia—think again, nothing to show your gratitude? Oh yes; and he leaned forwards, the black eyes gleaming like hot coals and the thick lips all a tremble. You have—and he whispered into her ear.

Staggering as if under a blow the wife rose, gasping, one hand on her heart, then with the other, strong and full, she struck the thick lips with all her strength, no spasmodic gesture, but a blow that split the flesh.

I would kill you for that, snarled Dmitri Isanban; but that I can do better, Paul will pay me. Go—go, or I may spoil my vengeance after all. And thenceforward there was war, the war of the hawk and the dove.

No special harshness, no direct brutality, but a close surveillance. Once, when she spoke to a Cossack of the guard, the man was seized and flogged. Once, when in ignorance she passed the bounds of the settlement, she was warned that, woman as she was, a like punishment waited a second offence. Gradually throughout the settlement it became known that Madame Blatoff was dangerous, and even her fellow-unfortunates shunned her, lest worse things befall them. Dmitri Isanban had banned her. Then, still harder to bear, came rumours floated from the depths of the mine, none knew how, vague suggestions of evil: at one time sickness, at another sterner rules, and again of brutal cruelty under the guise of punishment and in the name of justice; and through them all Paul's name was muttered under the breath in prayer and pity.

Marie endured all until nature was on the awful edge of madness, then in her frenzy she again sought Dmitri Isanban.

What passed she never truly knew; on her part wild, pitiful beseechings, tears of agony at the first and then curses; on his, stolid coldness, unveiled malignancy, and the one answer, Pay the price, pay the price; on your head be the end.

The days went on. In the solitude of the

bare room, in the village street, on the dreary waste beyond the bounds, from every side there were voices crying, howling, wailing, Paul! Paul is dying, Paul is dying ; is dying—dying. Tears were a thing of the past, brain and blood were both afire, madness gaped and gibbered nearer, nearer.

Why spin out the story ? when the core of the tragedy is laid bare, it is time to ring down the curtain.

Alone in her room, with door locked and shutters barred, she passed one awful day, giving no answer to those who sought her. That night a gleam of light shot out into the vapours and across the snow from Dmitri Isanban's door, and before the grey of the morning the huge gates of the stockade swung to Dmitri Isanban's command. Towards the centre of the quadrangle a broad shed loomed dimly in the glimmer of the lanterns ; one end piled level to the roof with drifted snow. Asking no questions Marie ran swiftly up the trampled footpath to the shed door and passed into the greater darkness within. From the pit at her feet a noisome stench crept sluggishly to the more wholesome air. Up from the dense blackness into the faint reflected light of the snow a ladder stretched its gaunt arms, the mouldering wood slippery with ice. Now a

rung was missing, now two, rotted away by the reeking moisture ; under her strong nervous pressure she could feel the thin hard coating crack, and the sodden dampness ooze upon her hand.

Down into the depths ; the fetid smell more deadly and oppressive at every step, till her brain reeled, and she was fain to creep into a cutting and by an instant's pause relieve the strain on muscle and nerve.

Then down once more into the black abyss, always with this comfort—the fouler the air and blacker the darkness, the nearer to Paul ; for the lowest depths were all too shallow to hide away one whom Dmitri Isanban hated as he hated Paul Blatoff.

To the bottom at last ! none had asked her whence or wherefore, her very presence was voucher enough. Paul Blatoff ? Paul Blatoff —who was he, this Paul Blatoff ? ah ! Number 89, was his name Paul Blatoff ? Well, numbers were much better than names. Number 89 ; the cutting to the left—its farthest point. Here and there evil-smelling lamps smoked in the darkness and through their shadows Marie stumbled her way. Paul ! Paul ! Paul ! she cried, her voice shrill and high-pitched, ringing and echoing down the silent unaccustomed galleries of pain. Paul ! Paul ! Paul !

There, in the flicker of the farthest lamp ; Paul ! oh my Paul ! at last my husband, my beloved ! Was that Paul ? It had been, once ; but not for this hour past.

Dmitri Isanban was a devil.

‘Whether you say that of yourself, or for him who told the story,’ I cried out hotly enough, ‘you say truth. But can such men be ?’

‘See,’ It said, ‘how you prove my theories. What do you care for the high lights ? The tragedy of the wife’s sacrifice, infinitely greater though it is, is forgotten ; it is as nothing. Very evidently that which interests you lies elsewhere. What is that word people are so fond of using nowadays ? decadence. It is suggestive of corruption, but it sounds impressive, and looks well on paper ; perhaps some other time you will tell me its meaning.’

VIII

It is a curious thing how our opinions and impressions vary. Not so many days ago, scarcely weeks, there was a certain amount of terror in the almost nightly association with that which I did not understand ; terror, probably, because I did not understand.

Then came a new element of consciousness,

pride. These visits became something more than curiosity, something more than fear ; they became sources of congratulation and a new self-esteem, a new pride,—again, probably because I did not understand, and the incomprehensible tickles our pride almost as deliciously as it does our fears.

But there was a third step, one into something strangely like resentment. The links in the chain might hang thus : Here is a thing which is incomprehensible ; result, fear. The incomprehensible chooses me for companionship ; result, pride. But, to judge by the past, the types chosen for association by the incomprehensible are unpleasant and at times repulsive. The choice of association now rests on me ; result, resentment at the suggestiveness. The idea was a disturbing one, and as I sat under the sheltered sunny side of the ruin, not all the autumn glory of the woodland could bring me peace. Winter is a season of early growth hereabouts, and the sere and yellow leaf follows hard on the luxuriant amplitude of summer boughs. The sap has ceased to run, and those first early frosts of a week back have sobered the exuberance of life, though not of colour.

Strange what a beautiful thing is decay for all its pathetic suggestiveness. Never in their

dawn of new life, nor in their vigour of strength, have the woods such a charm and variety, such surprises of unimagined colours, as when the fingers of death are plucking impatiently at the leaves. It is nature's pæan of glory ; its swan-song before dissolution.

Keats must have meant some such thing by his 'Spirit ditties of no tone' ; which thought suggested the Etruscan Vase of the night before, which again suggested It, and my grievance.

What was there in ME to be haunted in such a fashion ?

Just then David came round the angle of the Grange carrying some implement of his craft over his shoulder, but looking, as I thought, more keenly in search of gossip than labour, and, as it is a pleasant thing to gratify other people in gratifying ourselves, to him I put the question.

'Hoots, fowk's aye alike. There's no a tyke in the wynds o' Glasgae but sits up on its stump tail an' thinks the warld was made to pleasure it an' for naething else. Is it your thocht that yon uncanny, the Lord-kens-wha, has twirled his thumbs thaе twa hunnert years waitin' on you? Sakes me ! but the patience o' Job was a fule's wrath matched wi' yon ! If that were fac' then it's been a sair sorrow till It,

I'm thinkin', after sae far a cry. Na, na ; dinna fash yoursel'. Be humble, sir ; be humble, an' tak' nae pride that you're waur than your neebours.'

David might be comforting, but the comfort was that of the mustard plaster ; it would be pleasanter if it were less vigorous.

He fixed the hoe firmly into the ground, and leant heavily on the handle. 'Ye see, sir, the feelosophy o' it is juist this——'

'Oh bother the philosophy of it!' I said ; 'talk sense, man.'

'Ou ay ; it's a' ane to me, sense or feelosophy, whilk ever ye wull. Here's soond sense. I'll be wi' ye the nicht, an' ye'll see it's nae you he's daunderin' after ; I hae my ain opeenion o' that.'

'But suppose It doesn't come to-night, David ?'

'The mair loss mine an' yon thing's, sir ; but dinna fash yoursel' wi' that. It wad be a bad makshift, nae doot, though I'm no sae ill to please as ye think, an' twa three oors are nae sae lang till a man wi' a tongue in his heid.'

'No, David,' I said brutally ; 'but what about the man with two ears ?' And even the air of dignity with which David cocked his chin did not detract from the blessed satisfaction of having paid off a score.

‘I think you were a little hard on David,’ It said, when that evening I related the interview. ‘Indeed, in a longer experience than will, I fear, fall to your lot, I have never known a good gossip to be a thorough-paced scoundrel.’

‘And your theory?’

‘Theories!’ It waved Its hand contemptuously. ‘Theories are for boys; men outlive them and are content with facts. Why pry and peer into this cause or that? You remind me of the boy who pulled his rose to pieces in a vain endeavour to find its perfume. Listen, and I will tell you the story of a man who had his theories until fact came and brushed them aside and stared them out of life itself. An old story in more senses than one, but to fix its date for you I will give it as “LEAVES FROM FRA GIOVANNI’S DIARY.”’

19th May.—Florence at last, and all the saints be praised! Praised, be it understood, that the journey, dusty and soul-wearying, has come to an end, not because the goal is reached. A subtle distinction, my book, which you and I can understand. Praise that the toil is past, not that the end is gained.

A sullen, uncouth city. Who, dandled on the knees of Rome and nourished on her

glories, could praise even the weakest saint for such a compulsory haven as Florence? Not I.

But to be quit of the dust and glare and heat of that last interminable valley, and to be housed in the tranquil coolness of even such gloomy lodging as these rude lords can give, is something calling forth a benediction, and so—
All the saints be praised!

What an ill-luck was mine to be hooked on to the train of a paltry embassy to hang three miserable monks! Could not our Holy Father have let these coarse Florentines do their own hangings without thrusting his sacred fingers into the business? wearing the soul of Torriano to a shred—though that, I think, is no great labour, and is due more to the journey than the cause thereof—until he be as cross-grained as an olive stock; and fretting mine to boot, a much more sad affair to him who owns the soul!

But that gay blaze to follow on the heels of the hanging will set the General in his humour again. Why hang them first? say I. But that, it may be, is because I never yet saw a man burnt, a pity truly that a good experience should be wasted! It may be I shall never be so near a good burning again; and then to hang them first—the dolts.

If all I hear be true, they would go to the

fire rarely, unless that poor Sylvestro failed of his nerve, and even that would lend a strangeness to the sight—add, as it were, a fresh flavour. But what a fool am I to pat my expectation on the back ; hanged they will be, and there's an end of it.

Strange how a man's humour changes with rest and a good meal ! Both I have had, and the old town, which this very morning seemed so crudely conceived and rugged, has taken on a softened touch, and a glamour which is not Roman, yet comes near to me strangely.

Perchance that Duomo of Brunelleschi, aided by Giotto's slender shaft of beauty, has cast its spell upon me ; and—this alone to thee, oh mirror of my soul !—that strangely sweet, sorrowful face under the shadow of the great tower has moved me to kindlier thought. What a fair penitent to shrive ! To what a long category of innocent sin could I not give ear ! How gently could I not guide the timid soul which looked upon me with such sad eyes ! With what solicitude—bah, Giovanni, my friend, she is not for thee to shrive ; but Florence is the brighter for her face for all that ! That was where Girolamo preached ; and what a waste of intellect ! The Red Hat to be had for the holding out his hand ; and to hug his dreams the rather, and prate against the Pope ! Gio-

vanni, why wert thou not in his shoes? But, then, had he not so prated, the Hat had never been dangled. For advancement there is nothing like a stern virtue held under judicious control. There is where Girolamo failed and where Giovanni had succeeded—had he had the virtue?

We mostly, I think, take after our mothers, and Rome is the only parent I ever knew. Perchance had I lived in San Marco, that face would have seemed to me only sorrowful, the sweetness nothing; but I am Roman, and the sweetness moved me first, the sadness after.

20th May.—An early mass at San Marco; my white-robed brethren seem like so many frightened pigeons, such a flutter has the coming of Torriano wrought amongst them.

Already they are eager to abjure this Girolamo and all his works; a case of witchcraft surely, since they fought like tigers for him a few short weeks gone by; or a case of pitiful cowardly hounds cringing to heel at the first clear stroke of the whip. To-day I will make my choice, for Romolino and the General will bring the three face to face, and having endured the toils from Rome hither, I must needs be there to see the baiting; and yet the sport will be but poor, for the odds are sorely

unfair. All Christendom and the devils of the Medici against three poor monks. The powers of heaven and hell against two fanatics and a chattering imbecile.

Poor Girolamo, he were better to hang at once, and have done with it, for the Bishop will play him like cat and mouse, torture him soul and spirit, and hang him bodily afterwards; a zealous reformer is Romolino.

Strange how that face haunts me—a glimpse yesterday and another to-day. Mere glances shot into the eyes, no more; count three slowly, twice, and that is all; but I am restless and stirred in a way that is new to me. To-day I think she knew me, for the eyes flashed an inward question, then darkened as if the answer had not pleased. But what is that to me? Strange I never thought to tell myself before I am a monk. If there be many like her in Florence, small wonder Girolamo preached, and is to hang for his preaching.

Let me praise the saints that I am Roman and not Florentine, else had there been four monks to hang instead of three.

How those black Franciscan dogs bayed at his heels! Truly he must be a great man to be worth so much good honest hate, the only honest thing about them. How he scorned them!—yet hardly scorn, rather a tolerant

contempt, as if nought better could be looked for ; while all the while Torriano, for very decency's sake, strove to hide that the man was judged already. Then at last—

‘Thou hast a devil,’ shouted Romolino ; ‘and this kind comes not out but by prayer and fasting.’

‘A devil, Lord Bishop ?’ cried he back, smartly enough, a gleam of fire in the hawk’s eyes shrunk deep in their hollows. ‘So said they of One of old, and lied. As for fasting, the rack has been my banquet-board these many days past, and that thou knowest.’

Then his eyes swept us who stood behind, and he flung his hand out as if into our very faces.

‘Prayer and fasting ! See ye to that, with your wine-feasts and your love-feasts. For me, I go to a feast which no mortal hand hath spread.’

Then he fell silent, and looked up to the roof of the great hall, the glory flaming in his eyes and a smile flickering round his moving lips as if he spoke with one who pleased him well ; as truly I believe he did.

I would I had remained in Rome ; a man like this is a sore fret to my complacency, and wrenches the very foundation of my peace and comfort. Why could he not have hung in silence ?

I think those Franciscan curs would have torn him to pieces then and there, had not the soldiery fenced him round, not for love, since he has lashed them many a time, but for very shame's sake, lest the murder seem too gross. And what need to kill, when the legate had the Pope's decree in his pocket? Sheer waste of good justice, and at a risk too.

Passing out of the hall I plucked the General by the sleeve. 'Twas hopeless, I knew, for who is Torriano to stand against Alexander, even if he so willed? But my heart was seething in hot blood, and speak I must, the more readily, perhaps, that it could serve no end.

What I said is gone from me—not argument, I think; men in my temper have no thought for cold rule of right and wrong—but rather to move his pity.

Give him his due, he heard me out, and what a fool I must have looked amongst them all; then patted me lightly on the shoulder.

'Thou hast learned a good lesson, Giovanni. Of all the pleas to move a human soul, the plea of the poor devil is the best.' Then he laughed, with rather a choke in his breath, I thought, gathered up his robe about him, and was gone, leaving me licking dry lips with a dry tongue. At heart not a bad fellow, Torriano, and he hates the Franciscans, as becomes his order.

Well, it is none of my doing, and my soul's my own ; if a man can call his soul his own when it is pulled this way and that by a fire-brained monk and a face in the crowd.

21st May.—She seems to haunt the churches. Yesterday it was San Marco, to-day the Duomo, where I saw her from my place beside the General, and the gaunt, naked walls took on a glow that all Agnolo Gaddi's glory of glass could not give them.

A venom-bitten Franciscan raved a full hour, and I, who by reason of being a monk am intolerant of much preaching, gave him my benediction for his wordiness. What a rest it was to sit and watch the play of light in her eyes ! What a passion of light lay behind that flash of white wrath ! What a divinity of pity melted in her tears ! For the black-coated dog in the pulpit moved her to both, and all for Fra Girolamo ! Had I but stood in his shoes no monk had hung for reform ! But had there been no fury of reform, would the eyes have blazed and wept as they did to-day ? What hast thou to do with her eyes, Giovanni ? All of a clap it has come that thou art both man and monk, with the devil to play the see-saw between the two.

Now and then the crowd surged between me

and her face ; then what could I do but hear the harsh yelp of the coward cur snarling at his betters ? A nice Sunday homily, in truth, for men and women to hearken to, who, within the same walls, have swayed, breathless, to pleadings of a heaven-possessed soul.

I think, but that the crowd surged back again, I must needs have wrecked my certain prospects of preferment, and plucked the poison-tongued liar from his place ; but, praise the saints ! the throng, heaving this way and that, was not long in clearing a laneway to where she stood beside a pillar over against the pulpit. And then the tempest of invective died into a music, and I sat as at a feast, with such a vision as Angelico might have seen. What was that he said yesterday ? Prayer and fasting ? Curse him ! what does he know of the hunger of a human soul ? Not for overmuch, a look or a touch, I think ; but the crave tears and gnaws and yearns.

For a full hour I have spoken with him face to face. It came about in this wise.

Torriano loves not the Franciscans, as how could he, being a Dominican and our very head and front ? Girolamo brought disfavour on the order, therefore Girolamo must be crushed. But to-day that Fra Maladetto—I know not his name—mingled a crafty censure in his

speech, pouring his vials upon all our robes, and so roused the General's wrath. Hence, if Girolamo may be spared, spared he shall be, Alexander and his legate notwithstanding, and St. Dominic upheld. So that which my pleading could not do, being the word of a friend, may be done by the gibe of an enemy.

So I then, as one of the order and innocent of all heat, was sent to seek a reasonable pretext whereby the dead might live.

The turret room which has been his home these six weeks past looked none so comfortless. A crucifix—pictures he would none of—pens, ink, and paper; a cunning trap it seemed to me, but one that failed of its purpose, for though the bruised fingers laboured sorely, the clear brain gave the enemy no cause to rejoice.

What a great soul he has; greater than his mind, for all his intellect, for it was something more than human wit that brushed aside all my words, so that in less than five minutes I dropped all cunning of fence, and spoke with him spirit to spirit.

Was he coward enough to save himself and San Marco perish? Death! What was death to him but safety? Could he hide himself away in the grave in peace, while Florence the beloved fell a prey to the Medici? Did he dare no

longer face the wrath of Alexander that he fled . . . to the peace of God ?

Who would rise as champion of a pure Church if he were swept aside ? *He* to lay himself to rest ! *He* to flee to the grave for peace ! and all for a partless point of principle. A hair-splitting, with the whole fabric of the Faith at stake. A coward, I said, a coward, a coward ! And in his face I flung back the gesture of the day before.

At the word his face took on a tinge of red—the weakness of fearing to seem weak ever beset Girolamo—but for all the flush in the cheek I might as well have urged the statue of Fortitude on the Loggia outside the window.

Yet through his calmness his lips quivered pitifully.

‘San Marco and Florence are doomed,’ he said sorrowfully. ‘They knew not the day of their visitation. Look, to-morrow, what I wrote in the great hall beneath. The Faith ? That is eternal. The Church ?’ his eyes kindled. ‘That will rise the higher for my ashes. It would go far to break my heart if Romolino held back my crown from me. My Church shall climb upward, nearer to the life invisible.

‘Purity of the priesthood ? See thou to that ! The work of life lies nearest to our

door ; the gates clang behind me, for my warfare is ended. See thou to thine.'

Prone before him, persecuted, forsaken, accursed as he was, prone before him I huddled myself, and would have kissed his feet, but that he drew me up and laid his lips against my forehead. There was silence a moment, then he said, like one in a dream—

‘Prayer and fasting ; this kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting.’

After that he seemed to forget that such a one as I was in his presence.

The prison-house was broken, blotted out, the roof shrivelled to a vapour, and pure heaven was round about him in his prayer.

As for me, I stumbled down the dusky staircase, groping my way, awed by the glory of his face, ‘See thou to that !’ singing in my ears as it has sung ever since.

At the stairfoot Torriano met me, but asked no question, passing me by with a look, no need for words. The foreshadowed end must come.

22nd May.—Already there is a bustle and clamour in the great square into which this old palace thrusts a grey shoulder. The clank and din of hammers mingled with the hoarse monotony of many voices.

From the window, had I but the heart to

look, I could see that slowly lengthening tongue of wood which to-morrow is to glow so horribly red at the point. Sentence has been confirmed.

Knowing the inevitable, I most piteously besought the General to forego my attendance, and so spare my poor flesh a pang ; but he was adamant.

‘The honour of the order requires it,’ he said. ‘We must show these dearly loved brethren of St. Francis that this is but a local plague-spot on our white robe, and not a leavening disorder. Since we cannot save the poor devils, we must do the next best thing, and burn them with the cheerfullest grace we can show, so that the dogs yelp not.’

So it came that at the tragic farce of confirming the already confirmed, I stood beside his chair. They die to-morrow for seeking to pluck a flame out of a coal fire.

It was full six weeks since these three had met, six weeks brimful of torment to body and spirit. I think there were few eyes but felt the flush of moisture when those three monks drew together in the centre of the hall, and kissed one another solemnly in their bonds ; shattered in frame but unbroken in will.

When the eagle has been snared in the net there is little to be said of meaner fowl in like evil case ; therefore of the lesser brethren not much is writ.

To-day, many a time, Domenico would have broken out into bitter words, for all his soul was shaking with wrath ; not for himself, but for the Prior of his adoring love. But with a touch Girolamo subdued him, if not to peace at least to silence. A strong soul, Domenico ; yet had there been no Girolamo, Domenico had lived and died the Pope's very humble servant.

As for Silvestro, he trembled like a reed, a mere physical reaction, as I think, for the spirit was unbowed. The face might be pale, as whose might not at such a time ? But the eyes which looked at Romolino up and down had no terror in them.

What a companionship must be theirs to-night, though not one of words, I think ! There is but little room for words where the energy of faith crystallises into death. One of spirit rather, and that strength which comes of union.

I would I were with them, then I might fight down the devil better than now. What a pendulum is man ! Let me set it down, that I may look the truth in the face.

Leaving the hall with all the exaltation of rage and pity beating at my brain, there looked out of the crowd about the doorway that sorrowful sweet face which has haunted me these three times. The blood surged to my

heart and eyes like a wave flood, so that I gasped and staggered—blinded. The exaltation crumbled to despair, and all for a woman's face.

See thou to that—prayer and fasting! See thou to that—trample nature under foot and rise to heaven upon it! But heaven seems near at hand! See thou to that! How?—how? Prayer and fasting! See thou to that!

What an echo rumbles from the square! There is the thud of a mallet: there the crash of a plank flung from shoulder high: the sharp ring of a bolt driven home: the rhythmic traffic of life to slay life!

Has Florence no heart? Is gratitude dumb, is memory dead? Is there not a soul in this accursed city that remembers? Ay, there is one. Oh pure, pale face, and sorrowful, deep eyes! But the hammering and turmoil of this red funeral horror will not let me rest, with its passionate insistent voice. I must leave it all for to-night, or I shall go mad.

23rd May.—All night long the brute city has prowled round the square, howling like a famished beast, restless and on the alert for blood. All night long, through the hoarse outcry, has rolled the din of labour. Rasp of saw, clang of iron, and the hurrying feet trampling the hollow planks.

No peace without or within, for all night long I have cried into the darkness, and there is none to hearken.

Dimly the light has crept in, seeming to bear upon its wings, more shrill and clear than in the gloom, the noise of the eager life-thirsty floodtide of wrath outside. In this I am steadfast; not even the General himself shall drag me out to see the angry lust for murder in the eyes of those who have been loved so well.

Ha! how the tumult swells into a roar, and dies away in a gasp of silence as if the breath were choked down ten thousand throats.

I can hear their feet—the shuffle on the planks!

Is that the murmur of the office for the dead? Oh, God in heaven, shrieve them! Oh, God in heaven, receive them!

It dies away. There is a buzz of expectation. The ladder—the rope—the struggle.

What is that? The crackle and roar of fire already, and a new red light that dances horribly on the wall!

Down on thy knees, Giovanni, and weep. Who weeps with thee but that one sorrowful pale face?

‘Ay: theories are well enough

Until a man by sudden act
Faces some eternal fact,

when, not infrequently, they fail. Now you, no doubt, have a half score of theories about —no, not about me ; we will leave personalities to parliamentarians if you please ; but, let us say, about my environment. I like that word, it suggests juxtaposition so much better than mere surroundings. My verse-maker has cast one of his theories into form and tacked it on to life. Is he right, you ask ? You will find out for yourself some of these days, and I shall lose a sometimes sympathetic companion. Meanwhile, grope. You would be none the happier of the foreknowledge, since behind all knowledge something lies hidden.

‘ He has called the rather irregular verses
“ AND THEN ? ” ’

I

A thing to take and lay on your heart,
And wonder how it is God has given,
All in a day, so large a part
Of what is surely the peace of heaven.

The irresponsible, dewy touch
Of rose-petal lips, and bud-like pout :
And the thought that the angels know not such
A glory as motherhood finds out.

The stir of a cream-soft cheek on the breast
Where never such cheek has lain before !

God has taken the world's unrest
 And shut it, somewhere, outside the door.

And only, and only, if life could lie
 And hark to the music of quick soft breath,
 How would it ever seem hard to die,
 And where are hid the sorrows of death ?
 And then ?

II

Whether is nearest and dearest—
 The helplessness clinging
 In passive dependence, and holding
 The strings of our hearts in frail fingers :
 Or where, seen through eyes that are clearest,
 The soul, in its earliest springing,
 Doubtful, and slowly unfolding
 Its pinions, tries life, and yet lingers ?

There, from the grey of the vision,
 Unruffled, and deep as the ocean,
 Half-conscious as yet, and uncertain
 Looks out the Spirit eternal.
 Love, as it may be, elysian :
 In tune to each tender emotion ;
 Or curse of vile loathing, the curtain
 Shutting in the infernal.

Ours, almost, the decision.
 As lies in the hands of the pruner
 The training and shaping to beauty
 The groping and blinded forces
 Of nature : till with precision,
 That which later or sooner
 Bends in fruition of duty,
 Grows aright by unconscious courses.
 And then ?

III

Surely strength is the glory and good
 Taken, applied
To each shifting and varying mood
 Of this life of the myriad side.

Look the world in the face ! Not with eyes
Of the weakening obstinate fool,
Who, seeing a thing defiant, defies,
Striking blindly at what he should rule.

Look toil in the face ! and, if needs,
 Stoop down, bare-armed, without shame
To meet the thing to be done ; for the deeds
 Of a man are his life, and his name.

Look love in the face ! not the mask
 Of passionate, hollow desire ;
But love that sets self under heel, not as task
 But as ladder-rung up to the higher.

Look faith in the face ! Brush aside
The forms and the veilings of creed ;
Shred this and shred that, for they hide
As a vesture the truth and its need.

Look the years in the face! Let them wear
From decade on into decade;
What matters their growth if we dare
Look God in the face—unafraid?
And then?

IV

Slowly grew the garb of strength,
Short it bided; now it slips

Slowly, surely ; till at length
 Come those kisses on the lips ;
 Last of earth and first of heaven.

Slowly shrinks the world as shrinks
 Phantasy of morning's dreams ;
 Three-score years of cherished links
 Snap asunder, and there gleams
 Last of earth and first of heaven.

From the wearied fingers fall
 Useless and uncared, unsought—
 Rather scorned it may be—all
 Toil has won us. Near is brought
 Last of earth and first of heaven.

Fades the grand material earth,
 Crumbling as a crust of sand ;
 Through the struggling pangs of birth,
 Faith thrusts out a groping hand,
 Last of earth and first of heaven.
 And then ?

v

Who knows ? A silence, as I think,
 There on the farther edge of the brink.
 Silence impenetrable spread
 Betwixt the living and the dead,
 Impregnate with a last regret
 That scope and power of time are set ;
 And what was left undone must wait
 Importunate at the eternal gate,
 Since God has taken to His hands
 The record as the record stands.
 A moment, or a thousand years,
 To dry upon the cheek the tears
 Love let fall in that supreme

Swift end to three-score years of dream.
And then, the staggered soul aghast
Upon the illimitable vast,
Where inklings of creation float
And beckon to the near remote.
God here, God there, and far removed
And near at hand the worlds God loved.
And then—who knows who has not trod
The silent pathways up to God !
But this. The Then is Present's heir
And heaven is much of what we were.

IX

'YOUR friend differs,' I said to It the next evening, 'from a famous dedication by a certain vigorous writer who has of late bound us his bond-servants, both in prose and verse.'

'Did I not tell you there were half a score of theories? Let me tell you a little more. Take them all, these half score of theories, and as many more as you can find or create for yourself, as men have a fashion of doing; and out of them compound one stupendous forecast of imagination, and you touch the hem, perhaps, of one of truth's many garments. Yes; I quite understand you. Why don't I tell you the truth and have done with it? Bah, my friend, be honest at least to yourself. Would you believe me if I did, or do you not rather fear that the unexpected vision would blind

your sight as it did that of the king of old? A curious race you are; you quote your Shakespeare smoothly and seriously—"There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy," and having said so, go on your way a sceptic, pouring your contempt on the inquirer, however honest. The truth is, you prefer your blindness, in which you rather resemble a certain beggar of my ancient acquaintance; and as his story crosses that borderland betwixt this world and the next, of which you are so eager to glean tidings, it may suit your present mood to listen to a reminiscence of "BRUGSCH THE BEGGAR."

I

To the Lord—may His name be exalted—rise prayers and thanksgivings where to all other ears is silence. From the drooping palms by the dried wells of the desert; from the brown lizards gasping on the scorched wall; from the dumb grief, tearless above its dead; from uncomplaining years of living misery, pour petitions with infinite importunity where, to even Israfil the keen-eared himself, there is silence.

The heat of the day had passed, and the tremulous shimmer over the undulations of red sand flickered fitfully, and ebbed away in the

grey which swallowed up the ruddy orange of the sunset. The night birds fluttered out from their hiding-places, as yet half-dazed by the last of the after-glare! The lean dogs crept from shadow to light and stretched themselves, then stole complaining through the narrow streets, seeking food to satisfy the hunger of the day. The thick shutters closing the windows from breath of heat or ray of light, were thrust back; and the shrouded faces of women peered out, gasping for the coolness of evening. Doors swung open in the hot walls, and through them life poured out to swell the noise and turmoil of daily necessity, and with his fellows Brugsch the beggar crept to the gate, and as he passed on his shrunken arm-stumps and horny knees, the dogs lifted their heads from their feast of garbage and howled at him as at one even more miserable than themselves.

Twice a day, once at early morning and once at the cool after sunset, did Brugsch the beggar make his slow, painful pilgrimage to the Mecca gate, twice a day returning to the shadows of his cellar: once when the heat of the sun stifled life in the city, choking even the importunate cries of poverty; and once when the full darkness fell, and the city gates were flung to, and barred.

For thirty years he had sat in the shade of

the huge arch whose opening faced the glare of the south, and the Mecca merchants were few indeed who did not know Brugsch the beggar and the wooden bowl slung by thongs from the maimed stumps thrust eloquently out without word or whine, yet more importunate than the shrillest cries of Abdallah the blind, who sat crossed-legged beside him.

But familiarity had blunted the edge of pity, and the days were few when the harvest reaped sufficed for more than the barest pitiful necessities of urgent hunger. If such days came, there were praises to Allah the Giver for his bounty ; if not, the scant measure of dates or pounded maize was eaten, and no complaint flung back to the face of heaven ; and when even these fell short there was unfretful silence in both heart and mouth. For eight days past but little had fallen into the wooden bowl. First the scirocco blew, and for three days the gates were silent, men passed neither in nor out, or, if in, then in such haste as men pass when fleeing for their lives, and the beggars who sat in the shelter of the gate were as shadows of the death which might have been, a death of silence, blindness, and maiming.

The merchants who passed out thereafter passed in an evil mood, sore vexed at the loss through the delay of their caravans ; and

the few who staggered in, staggered in bereft of all but life and reason, with no gift but the gift of curses as Abdallah the blind clutched at their torn garments. So the beggars at the gate begged in vain, and starved.

The orange red of the west slipped through olive into dove-like grey ; Aldebaran and his fellows broadened into splendour, and a silver veil drifted across the east as the rim of the moon drew near to the edge of the sandhills. Slowly, and with reluctance, the hum of the city faltered and died away. Then there came a shrill cry from the watch-tower, and the gates of the city swung together, the heavy bars fell into their sockets, and night had come.

In weariness, hunger, and uncomplaining pain, Brugsch the beggar crept through the alternate silver and ebony of the noisome, narrow winding ways, back to the darkness of his cellar, dragging himself yard by yard over the heat-baked, hard, uneven pavements, and with no hope before him but that sleep might end his misery for a span, and that perchance Allah might send him better fortune in the day to come.

As coolness grew into blessing, the city sank to rest. Calm, the calm of living peace, not the swoon of mid-day death, succeeded to the spasm of evening restlessness ; a quiet glory

descended to the dark ways with the streaming moonlight. Here a dome was dressed in silver lustre, clear and sharply cut against the purple of the sky, there a carven arch loomed through the gloom; its marred and broken tracery hidden in the merciful shadow, and only the beauty of its strength apparent. The merciful and inimitable magic of moonlit night transformed even the sordid byways of the city to suggested loveliness, and through it all Brugsch crept wearily on, less touched and less observant than the very dogs whose howling was hushed as the stillness of holy night brooded from gate to gate.

Though to Brugsch sleep came not, yet to stretch himself on the well-beaten rice straw was a gladness and relief, as he lay in waking dreams of the good which was not. Suddenly a swiftly gathering light, as of a premature, immediate dawn, swept away the darkness as a tempest sweeps the dried leaves from a trodden wayside, and out of the shadowless light grew a shape the likeness of which it is not given to men to speak of, since it comes in many forms and to no two men the same, but through all the circle of imagination from divinest peace to the desperate horror of despair. Nor is the face which men think they see that which the angel wears.

Brugsch the beggar rolled himself prone at the sight, and pushing out his twisted hands, hid his face between his arms.

‘Nay, look up, for, though men know it not, this is the night of peace; and thou mayst look on the face of Azrael and live. The Lord—may His name be exalted—hath heard the voiceless prayer of thy suffering and patience, and hath a kindness toward thee, therefore am I come to bid thee cheer. Ere the sand hath glowed and cooled again, the gates of peace will have swung open, and the joys of paradise have blotted out thy years of wretchedness and pain, even as this light of mine hath quenched thy darkness.’

Then Brugsch spake up from his straw, ‘Oh, my lord, be not wroth; but is it very truth that thy servant may look upon thy face and live?’ And the angel answered, ‘Allah knows it is the truth; in death there are no lies, they are of life. I have spoken.’

Slowly Brugsch rose upon his wrists, pushing himself back until he rested on his knees. ‘Allah—may His name be exalted—hath given life and death unto the hands of my lord. Must this thing indeed be, and with the setting of the sun? Nay, nay; let mercy be shown unto thy servant, that I may live and not die;’ and through the straw he shuffled forward on

his knees ; 'See, my lord, what a thing I am. What should I do in paradise, gnarled and twisted like a blasted palm ?'

'Truly,' said the angel, 'here is a curious thing ; for thirty years thou hast gone maimed and starving, pain-racked and with never a day's bread assured, the sport of contemptuous pity, a prey to unabating misery ; and thou clingest to it all as if the blossom of life were still unfolded, and its honey not yet sucked.'

Brugsch shuffled nearer. 'Listen, my lord. All that is past. How know I that to-morrow will be as to-day ? This thing of life I have and know. That—let not my lord be wroth—that I know not ;' and one twisted, impotent hand slipped out as if to pluck at the angel's robe.

'Ay,' answered the angel. 'Thou knowest not, but I—though I may not say—I know, and thou art a fool.'

Brugsch the beggar shuffled yet a little nearer, and thrust out the other twisted hand, the shrunken fingers twitching in his terrible excitement.

'Truly my lord is right,' he said humbly. 'Yet the fool clings to that which he hath ; let the fool live till he be wiser. Five years, my lord ; five pitiful short years, what are they to Allah ? Nothing ! not five ? Four—three ?

What are two years, my lord, two years? Scarce time to taste the flavour of a man's life. Not two? One year—one, hearken, one! one!' and the maimed wrists smote one against the other over a fold of the angel's robe, shaking it.

'Not one? not one? For thirty years I have been this thing thou seest; have, as thou hast said, gone maimed, starved, scorned, and held my peace from wrath. Is it so much to ask, one year, one little year, a miserable dole cast to a beggar like Brugsch?'

'Truly,' said Azrael, 'when Allah made all things perfect, there was nothing more perfect made than fools. Hearken, Brugsch the fool. What Allah wills for thee I know not, the number of the dead is made up and cannot alter; but if any soul will take thy place, then thou mayst live—and suffer.'

The upturned face lit for an instant. Then the man shrunk back upon his withered heels. 'Allah makes sport,' he said; 'what fool will die before his time to give life to Brugsch the beggar? Will Allah make it rain souls, that one may perchance blow down that hole into my cellar; or shall the cripple crawl the streets in the darkness crying up my soul like a hawker, dead souls for living, until they beat my life out for a madman, and the number of the dead

be made up? Truly Allah must make sport to-night.'

'For thirty years,' said the angel, 'thou wert Brugsch the wise; for thou hadst faith to wait. Now thy foolishness grows like the greenness of the earth after the first rains. Dost thou not know that Allah gives with His hand open, and when He says, Seek, power is given to the searcher? Leave thy body there in thy straw, where both soul and body of such as thee belong, but that they came from Allah's hand; and He will send thy soul abroad to the ends of the earth until the sun rise and set again, so that thou mayst see and hear and return.'

'Ay,' answered Brugsch scornfully; 'and maybe an Afreet or a Jin will seize me, and my plight be the worse, with neither soul nor body, but an empty husk, like a nut from which some worm has sucked the juices ere it ripened.'

'Art thou then a true believer,' answered the angel, 'or art thou an infidel, that an Afreet or a Jin should seize thee when thou art doing Allah's will? Choose thou.'

While one might slowly count ten, the cripple looked fearfully into the other's face, then said, 'I have chosen,' and cast himself face down upon the straw, and from the prone body

the soul of Brugsch the beggar rose up into the darkness, for the light of Azrael was gone, up into the darkness and out into the starlight lying like the white pallor of death over the city, knowing all things with that instinctive sense which comprehends without sight.

II

Over the Medina gate rose the black mass of the prison - house, a turreted darkness bordered by a thread of silver where the moon-beams struck upon it, and looking what it was —a thing of terror and a blot upon the night.

Into the courses of massive stone which fronted the roadway was set a grating of stout iron bars, giving light and air to a narrow chamber let into the thickness of the wall.

Clutching the bars, with his brown face white in the starlight, lay a man staring up at the dim warder squatted eight feet away across the road, and at whom from time to time he flung a laconic question, receiving as laconic a reply.

‘A hundred blows, brother?’

‘Ay, a hundred blows.’

‘And all the time agony?’

‘Ay, all the time agony; unless they are merciful.’

The man in the cage worked his dry lips one over the other.

‘Brother, will there be mercy?’

‘No, no mercy, none.’

For a time there was silence; then, as if fascinated, he began again.

‘The tongue and eyes?’

‘Ay, the tongue and eyes.’

‘How long does one live impaled?’

He had seen and scoffed at many a blackening wretch, and knew every turn of the torture, but yet he asked, hoping to hear a merciful lie, even though he knew it to be a lie.

‘How long?’

‘Three days, or four, or five.’

‘Agony all the time, brother?’

‘Agony all the time.’

The bars rattled in their heavy sockets as he shivered. Then the soul of Brugsch the beggar spoke to him in silence, as spirit speaks to spirit. What his plea, and with what eager force he urged it, may be guessed without the telling. At the first the prisoner listened with a hungry attention, and the bars ceased to tremble in his hands. Then he answered, slowly as if communing with himself, ‘There are two that never give back — Death and Eblis. The dawn is not yet, and who knows but that the Cadi will have mercy?’

Then said the dim guard beyond the roadway, 'Thou art a fool, there is no mercy, and the east is red.'

As if in reply the other cried aloud, 'Who art thou that I should lie beneath the jaw of Eblis five days before my time, sucking its venom?'

'Now thou art mad,' answered the guard, 'and maybe it is well for thee. Yet for all that make ready, since the dawn is at hand.'

III

East of the city the orange bars of the morning were broken down, and the white glare and searching heat of the full day contended one with the other for possession.

A horse, newly dead, lay like a blur in the restless waves of the heat. Stretched as near as may be, so as to catch the miserable shadow of the beast, lay its rider, and beyond them both a torn water-skin shrivelling in the sun. Through the lesser heat of the night, through the growing power of the day, they had lain so, the one as motionless as the other, and the soul of Brugsch drew near and told the man his tale.

'Look you,' he said, 'Allah knows that I lie not; you are out, far out, from the track of

caravans. When your very name is forgotten, the winds of the desert may drift your dust to meet man, but not till then. Presently, when the sun drops down behind the sand, you, ragged-boned though you are where the horse has fallen on you, will crawl out into the cooler fever of the night, until Allah draws the curtain of day again, and you crawl back to the rotting carcase for the sake of its contemptible shadow. That day you will die—die, look you, in the agonies of desperation; cursing dumbly, because your black mouth has already dried to silence, and your shrivelled lips have cracked like a blasted pomegranate.

‘All that I spare you, and more, if there be vultures within scent, as when were there not in the desert?—vultures that hold not back beak and claw from the living if but the life be feeble, as thine will be.’

Carefully, like one who knows the value and cost of each feeble effort, the other shifted his head and looked up. Then, because, as Brugsch had said, his lips were dried to silence, his soul answered back, ‘Where one swallow hath gone another goes; I will wait,’ and the head rolled round again closer to the hide of the dead beast.

IV

Truly the Caliph hath a long arm ; it reaches from Mosul to Makallah, and woe unto him who erreth, for under its shadow there is death. There was a small city, and doubtless its Cadi had erred, though men knew it not, for through the hot silence of noon wails broke from Agib's house, and one stood across the doorway whom none thought well to question.

Then said the soul of Brugsch, 'Where there is wailing there is hope, and tears are to me as the water of life.'

When the fingers of the Caliph knocked at the door the servants of the house fled, and there was no longer the sound of feet upon the floor, and no voice but the voice of lamentation. The central sunshine, blazing into the courtyard past the angle of the flat roof, blazed on Agib and Agib's children—one, two, three, and four—tossed and twisted in a shapeless heap, where the fingers of the Caliph had flung them when all five were done with ; blazed in on Agib's one wife, and lent a satire to her wails. There were no words in the cries ; loss was too new a thing for fixed expression ; no words, only a shrill pitched cry from the throat, while the lips trembled, but never touched together.

Then she bent, separating her dead one from the other, and laying them in the shadow of the southern wall, all but her last born. Him she took, and, sitting by his father, laid the child's silent lips against her neck, and broke out.

'Is there no death for me, oh Allah—none for me?' and fell akissing the face of the boy. 'What to me is life with Agib dead and me bereft of these?'

Then it was the soul of Brugsch drew near, certain at last that the quest was ended. But when her numbed sense caught his meaning, the woman shrunk into the angle of the wall, buffeting the air with her open palms as if to drive him back. The wailing had ceased as she fondled the child, and the cry that rose was on a different note—the agony, not of loss, but of terror. A brief moment or two she leaned, buffeting and screaming thus, and as pallid as her dead, then lurched forward on her face and was still.

v

Upon Ali Hussein, chief Imaum of the Mosque, hath Allah laid the years lightly. Who, to see him pace down his garden of palms in the lesser heat of the day, would

credit that eighty-and-five years had passed him by?—so erect the head, and the eye so full of light. On the morrow it is his to pronounce an oration to the priest-probationers of the Mosque; and under the thick shadow of the interwoven palms he meditates his subject, and as the thought forms in his brain the soul of Brugsch is aflame with hope.

‘Lo! I have lived many days; have tasted good and overcome evil; have dwelt with men and have known the ways of men, and the curtains of their thoughts have been drawn aside until there is but little hidden from me. And whether in the bud of youth with its uncertain promise, or fruit of strength with its unattained desires, or yellowing leaf of the ripened wisdom with its unfulfilled hopes, this is the sum of all things—it is better to die than to live. Could we but weigh even the shadow of the lowest paradise in the one scale, and in the other the crowded triumphs, joys, gratified desires of a score of lives, the beam would not tremble an instant ere these emptinesses would be strewn to the winds.

‘To die! to rise above misfortune! to sport with that of which we have been the sport! to gather with each infinitesimal atom of eternity the thronged glory of ten thousand years! Life with its repetitions, however splendid,

sinks into contempt at the thought. To be the peer and fellow of Michael, Azrael, Israfil, a greater than the greatest ; to die, to become of the Immortals ; to draw near to Allah—think of the suggested glory !'

Then the soul of Brugsch cried out in dumb importunity, and at the noiseless voice Ali Hussein the Imaum paled whiter than his beard. 'What art thou ? Is Azrael behind thee or dost thou bear his sword ?'

'Nay, nay,' answered Brugsch ; 'of that Allah knows best ; but hearken.'

Ali Hussein heard him to the end, the flush of life slowly stealing back into his face ; then answered, 'Friend, from thine own mouth is my reply—Allah knows best. Who am I, unworthy that I am, to anticipate, though but by a day, the glories of His paradise ? I will wait.'

But that day he walked no more beneath the palms ; and later the priest-probationers hearkened to but a lame discourse.

VI

Up the slope, from his cellar to the street, Brugsch the beggar crept on his knees and twisted wrists, very slowly and wearily by reason of much hunger. A dream, he thought

within himself ; an ugly dream ; one born of over-long fasting. Who knows but before the darkness Allah will send me sufficient for a pillau, that I may eat and sleep in peace ?

The streets were already in shadow as he crawled towards the gate, but the mosque domes and minarets, the high-raised wall of the prison-house, were all in light ; and in the front of one a maimed and naked wretch had panted all day in the heat.

Abdallah the blind, his next neighbour in the gateway, lifted his head as the shuffling sound drew near. 'Where wert thou this morning ?' he cried ; 'such a harvest ! The sheik of El Massorah passed out, and Allah moved his heart to pity.'

'Who sleeps, eats,' answered Brugsch, rearing himself into his place, and thrusting out his twisted hands and dangling bowl. 'The pity of Allah dies not ; we shall see presently.'

The shadows of the palms beyond the gateway lengthened and grew grey in the weaker light, stretching themselves until their tops were lost in the eastern sandhills. 'I cannot see it,' said Abdallah the blind, 'but the rim of the sun hangs on the edge of the desert, doth it not ? Where is that pity of thine ? in an instant it will be dark.'

The outstretched hands of Brugsch the

beggar swayed from side to side. 'The pity has come,' he said; 'not darkness, but light, and Allah's tale of souls is made up,' and the wooden bowl fell clattering on the smooth stones, with Brugsch the beggar in a heap beside it. Then the rim of the sun dipped.

'But,' I objected, 'your Oriental is a fatalist.'

'Bah,' It replied, 'no man is a fatalist who hopes his tongue can talk him out of fatality. Your Aryan submits to the inevitable with a better grace than the Caucasian, that is all. In Arabia they have a legend which illustrates that your Oriental will lose nothing for want of the asking; no, not even though the doors of destiny appear closed for ever; and the wiser man he.'

The Lord—may His name be exalted—sat
In the glory that crowns the seventh heaven,
And legions of angels bowed thereat
From every circle out of the seven.

And as they worshipped, the airs hung still,
Straining to listen, on poising wing,
To the voice of the angel Israfil,
Singing as only he can sing.

And every voice in the under-earth,
In the seas beneath, in the skies above,
To the farthest son of the starry birth,
Answered the pitch of the song of love.

And every angel, from base to height
Of the world celestial, raised his song
In a sonorous transport of delight,
To a river of music, clear and strong,

That spread to an ocean of sweetest sound,
And dashed its waves to a tremulous spray
Of melody, filling the farthest bounds
To the steps of the throne, with liquid play.

But God—may His name be exalted—said,
‘Who has silenced the children’s voice ?
Why is the song of the innocent dead
Hushed when the rest of my worlds rejoice ?

And why do they linger outside my gate,
As if in fear of a Father’s frown ?
Who is there bids my children wait,
When the doors are opened, the bars throwndown ?’

Then a thin, shrill wail cut the musk-strewn air,
Like an edge of steel with death in the stroke ;
Sharp as a shivering cry of despair,
Through the flood of music its way it broke

To the throne of glory. ‘Hear, oh hear,
Thou who sittest there on the throne,
How can the children of love draw near
Into thy Paradise, thus alone ?

Give unto us that our heads may rest
As they rested of old, that we may still
Lie as we lay on our mother’s breast,
And the peace of your heaven have its fill.

Give us the strength of love, which barred
Our weakness out from approach of harm ;
Give us the sleepless watch and ward,
Give us the touch of our father’s arm.

Give us the touch of our father's hands,
Give us the clutch of our mother's robes ;
What unto us are the angel bands,
And the wonder of all heaven's seven globes,

If we may not look upon those we love,
Nor kiss the lips that in love have smiled ?'
Then the voice spoke out of the light above,
'Enter, beloved, both parent and child.'

When I come to consider the matter quietly it is evident that my friend is no more straightforward than if Its shadow were a substance clothed with flesh and blood. It is as evasive as a Chancery lawyer, and as difficult to pick up as a thimbleful of spilt mercury. To talk large generalities has ever been the stock-in-trade of the charlatan, whether he call himself Simon Magus, Cagliostro, or Sludge, and so I shall tell It at our next meeting.

X

How quickly winter slips his chilly feet into the golden shoes of autumn, and stamps out the life of nature, grown frail through age and much toiling for mankind.

It seldom happens, even here in the north, that the damps of November crystallise in frost,

but when it comes to pass the effect is beyond belief beautiful, as I discovered by the assistance of my evening visitor.

‘You may remember,’ It began, ‘that I once promised you a realistic story amid the ruins. Suppose we try the sorcery of the night as an aid to imagination. Put on your overcoat, take your rug, light your cigar, and come. As you have fortified yourself with port to-night instead of your usual claret, and an extra glass or so in addition, you need hardly fear the cold.’

‘What other piece of gossip has David told you?’ I asked. ‘Did I prefer my soup hot, and my salad cold, and use red pepper on my cucumber? All interesting points for a latter-day biography, to judge by certain outputs of publishers and for value much on a par with some of your experiences.’

Perhaps it was rude, but then it is so hard to be at all times particular to a shade, and what right had It to play the spy in such a fashion?

It settled Itself back in the chair, flung one leg over the other, and said, ‘Curious what a heavy-witted wine port is nowadays. The wine or the wit must surely have changed sadly for the worse in the last two generations. You are quite wise not to use it often.

Did I not suggest that you needed magic to touch your imagination?

'It requires no Sherlock Holmes to see the unused claret-glass there on the dinner-waggon, and when a man of his own choice drinks that which is unusual, he exceeds his average quantity. There you have the deduction; and now, if you have recovered your temper, we will go, but not otherwise, for the night is much too glorious to be spoilt by an average man.'

It was right. On consideration I am almost inclined to confess that It was always right, but such confession must not be made to It. It has associated too much with men for such a thing to be said safely.

Truly there was magic in the night. The white moon, large and full, sailed through the purple darkness, lighting up into a thousand facets the diamond dust that sparkled at our feet, and shaming the stars into pallor with its glory. But it was on the ancient keep, and its broken lines of walls and turrets, that the wizard had put forth his fullest power. Aladdin's palace took a night to build, but here was a marvel of ebony and silver raised from the bones of mouldered ages in a single hour.

'It is a pity, is it not, to dispel the illusion? Proximity is such a disenchanter; it kills

imagination, and imagination is the best part of beauty. See,' and with a warning hand It stayed our progress, 'how, draped in the veiling gauze of the moonlight, that turret hangs on the purple of the night. The intense blackness of the shadows have severed it from its supports, and it floats in air.' Then It broke off suddenly, and we again went forward. 'Your pardon, I forgot, you care for none of these things. To you it is more important that the stone on which you are about to sit should have a covering of dry moss for your comfort. So, sit there in the shadow of that angle and I will tell you my story. Not of this place, but of a grand old pile in the south country. As it is something out of the common we will call it the story of "THE HAUNTED GHOST."'

I

If there is a more picturesque castle in all England than that which tops a certain grassy hill in Gloucestershire, I know not of it. For the structure owes its attractiveness, not alone to situation but also, like this in which we now are, to the many generations through which it has reared its head; seeing that its stones were lichen-covered when the broken followers of

Charles passed beneath its walls flying from the storming of Bristol.

It stands surrounded by trees. Not dense thickets woven of interlacing boughs overhead with stems wire-drawn, and unrobust of branch by reason of internecine warfare and a choking through lack of air. A shrouded gloom in summer and a winter's wilderness of mire and decay. But rather trees dappled about an undulating lawn, whose declivity in all directions is such that even the stoutest, broad-shouldered giant of the wood cannot limit the horizon. Trees, leafy to their gnarled and ancient boles; elms of gigantic spread; oaks which might have held a Merlin; a brave sight in an August sun when a stiff breeze is sucking up the damps of the past night's dew, and the shadows of the old trees seem to frolic with one another to the whistle of its music, so swift is the interchange of light and darkness. A very picture of delight when a harvest moon is three parts up in the clear sky, and the landscape lies like a mosaic of fretted marbles in black and white; and all the air is so ghostly silent that the sudden hoarse hoot of an owl shakes the nerve with its startling abruptness.

From the castle a broad avenue, nearly a mile in length, and flanked on either side by a belt of mixed timber, leads down to the country

road. This way and that it curves with many a sweep through fat pastures and fields of broad-leaved grain, till it reaches the ancient gateway with its rotting stones, luxuriant in moss and fern. Half a mile farther lies the village, well-nigh but not quite as old as the castle—a child, rather, of its middle age, born of its protective power in those troublous days which built up England's hardiness and martial strength. However well the ancient keep may while in its prime have defended that which its lords possessed, the glory of its strength has passed away with the necessity for its protective power.

Time, the artist, has been a little too enthusiastic perhaps in his searchings after effect, using his strength with no restrained hand. Here a gable has been pushed down; there a roof torn off and powdered into the sod to the fructification of many generations of rank grasses. With a touch he has shattered a tower whose massive strength and rounded arches tell of Norman handiwork, and then by way of compensation he has dipped his brush in nature and applied a coating of wind-cropped ivy to a stretch of Elizabethan frontage. But the result, a noble façade clad in a close-fitting mantle of greenery, and terminating at either end in a round castellated turret, is so charming

that a slight excess of zeal in its production may be excused. Backward from these towers run the lines of the building, presently meeting the rear wall so as to form, not simply a parallelogram, but a square which had at one time contained an open courtyard surrounded by halls and chambers, corridors and guard-rooms, bower of beauty and cell of palmer; but almost all of these have disappeared; their only monument the ranker grass springing from their slow decay. The rusted remains of a huge portcullis still hang grinning from the central arch of the great doorway, like the bared and broken teeth of a hungry monster. To right and left stretches the most perfect portion of the castle, the massive roof and broadly-formed walls having successfully defied the ages' utmost efforts at destruction.

The castle faces due south, so that the light from the full moon which has almost climbed to its zenith shines straight in through the ivy-framed embrasures and unglazed windows, and falls in fantastic shapes on the earthen floor as the twigs and leaves carve it into grotesque outline. The dusty inner wall beyond is painted with ghastly splashes of white light, which, streaming through the outer doorway of the room, cross a ruined corridor and stretch themselves at last over the tangled wilderness

of the ancient courtyard, where they lie like a tattered shroud wrapping the dead past.

The room through which the moonbeams pass is high-roofed, long, and narrow, its darkness all the denser and blacker for the deathly light which strikes across one end, for the windows of the end farthest from the door are too thickly overgrown to admit the faintest ray. Yet, if one stood inside the outer door, the oppression of darkness would presently lift, and through the greyness would be seen the Lady of the castle, the last tenant of the many generations who have claimed it for a home, and one more feared than any Norman baron, lord though he might be of life and death; a tenant who, with the bats and the owls, had long held ownership; a tenant whose possession dated back to a certain night when a jealous lord discharged a debt of frailty with a dagger-thrust, and bade the law avenge itself, if it dared. Since then, to the infinite terror of a succession of neighbours, the lady had held possession, and none durst claim her hospitality; no, not so much as to set foot in her park after nightfall.

Small wonder therefore that she wearies of her loneliness, as crossing the feeblest bars of light she seems to thrust aside the ivy, whose leaves, in spite of the pressure leant against

them, still hang motionless, and looks out on the chequered hill-side, while the outline picture of the window greenery falls unbroken upon floor and wall. A youthful face and a fair it is that the moonlight shines through. Weak enough for all its petulant beauty, too weak for her own peace ; with its small chin, full mouth, and inattentive eyes. Yet fair enough to have cost two lives, whereof her own was one. Her dress is some soft flowing material, white like the moonlight, but with a shivering glister not found in the webs of life. It is loose at the neck, caught in by a silver girdle round the waist, and rippling down in a clinging skirt, drags the undisturbed dust a long half yard behind her as she moves. Her arms are bare from the elbow, and round the white fingers is a weight of over many rings.

‘Methinks the world grows colder,’ she says, leaning one hand on the mouldering sill and pressing the other across her breast as if to warm it ; ‘colder and more dreary. I can no longer abide this quiet. I must seek me some companionship. No equal ! that I could not brook after these many years of power and possession—and, above all, no husband !’ and she shudders as she turns to the outer door, and musingly crosses the corridor, while the shroud of light quietly filters its way into

the bed of nettles and lush grass born of rotting stone. 'No husband! No! but a servitor, not like him I had of old, but mayhap some churl to do my bidding; or tiring wench, though here there be no men to catch by her arts. There be none of my generation hereabout unless they lie under the mossy granite scattered round the old church. For want of better place I will to the churchyard to see if suchlike there be; but alack! my race grow few upon the earth.'

Across the corridor she takes her tranquil way, down the ruined spire of splintered steps, and into the huge hall beneath.

'Pah, how I hate this place! It was such a night as this, how many years ago? and here. No ivy then, no, or perchance we had been saved. What a fool the man was not to hear the ring of the spurred heel on the flags. The sword-thrust in the courtyard was well earned, and I can half forgive that dagger in the throat when I remember it was the same hand that paid the fool his wages. Yet I hate the place with its shadows and that slow-creeping sluggish stain that looked so black in the moonlight as it oozed across the floor. There, in the corner, he struck me while I shivered back from his stern face, and mayhap he was right. Ay, that was well enough, well enough, but to

drag me out into the moonlight to see that all was done ! that was no man's work. A strange thing to look upon yourself from the outer side. I mind me that methought I failed in beauty, but that perchance was the horror in the eyes and the dabbling of the——ouf ! it gives me the shivers yet, that ooze ! Well, that's an old tale,' and so she passes down the shattered steps, out under the rusty fangs of the portcullis, and down the wide bending sweep of the avenue.

II

Now, a week before, there had dwelt in the village a man with a curious gift. It was this. At will he could appear to throw his body into a trance from which no drug had the power of arousing him. The neighbours held it to be a fit of this kind or of that ; and even the doctors were puzzled, and so called it by a name incomprehensible to the simple folk ; whereby they hugely enhanced their reputation. But the man knew that all were alike wrong, and that it was not even a trance of the body, but an absolute separation of body and spirit. Not alone did the breath and heart-beat cease at these times ; that, for aught I know—being no doctor—might be right enough, and the neighbours have guessed truly ; but he saw strange

things, which come not of fits nor of all the evil diseases poor flesh brings upon itself,—visions which were realities and not dreams, revelations if you will, though he kept his counsel; and with these things which he saw we have nothing at present to do.

Now, a week before, he had laid down his body, and been swept for a brief space into another life. Hitherto he had ever been careful not to delay overlong his return to the flesh lest decay should set in by reason of absence of the living principle. But whether, this time, his flight had been farther, or the vision more absorbing in its revelations than ever before, may not be known. This at least is true, the doctors called him dead, and with ghoulish haste sought to force a proof of their theories. So they sawed off his brainpan and laid bare his heart, and, to every one's satisfaction but their own, triumphantly proved that they had been altogether right. But in one thing your honest doctor is like the ancient augur; and while he may deceive the people for the people's good, he himself remains undeceived; so the ghouls were none the wiser, having discovered nothing because there was nothing to discover. All of which did not prevent them from depositing cere this and cere that, brum and bellum, in wholesome spirits, where they remain until this day.

But the man, returning, found his place vacant and his household unconscious that its one time lord was seeking his own, and, to his sore grief, seeking unsuccessfully, for he had loved that body of his, and, after the fashion of humanity, never loved it better than now that it was lost. It was, therefore, with a bitter reproachful grief that he flung himself down on a certain new-made ridge to the wintry side of the village church, and lay there, day in and day out, all unheeded by the sexton as he piled up fresh mould on the rapidly sinking mound. What could he do? Not being dead, there were no gates of life to swing open for him. As for the vision of old, curiously enough, but plainly evidencing his continued humanity, he cared little for them now that they belonged to his sphere; nay, he almost loathed them as the cause of his bereavement. He was homeless, hopeless, an outcast. Familiar places were not for him. The ties which bound him to them were snapped, while no fresh cords of life had been knit for him. So he held fast by the churchyard, and, day in day out, lay under the shade of the old church and cried his heart soft with unutterable self-pity: or what he called his heart, for as yet he had not learnt the new nomenclature.

III

The lady passed down the curves of the broad avenue and out between the mossy pillars of the gate, thinking deeply the while and noting how the world had changed since she last went that way. For many a year—how many she knew not, seeing that she had reached that stage of existence when figures count for little—but many a year had crept on its way since she had last left the secure seclusion of her castle, and she grew fearful as she passed down the unfamiliar ways between the first houses of the sleepy old village. Here time had mellowed rather than altered, so that, though fear still fluttered within her, she went on with greater confidence. As for the village, it was asleep and heeded her not at all, except that the dogs howled in piteous fashion as she passed, and crept trembling into the darkest corners of their kennels ; though, for the matter of that, she was more frightened than they. Down the village street, round its wasteful, aimless curves she loitered on until at length she paused at the gate of the churchyard. The full moon was now a little past the prime of the night, and the shadow of the old church drifted transversely across the glistening dew-steeped grass. Not a tremulous breath of air

stirred the stillness, not a shifting fleece whitened the sky. The walls, the tower, the headstones, yews, and cypress trees were as clear in outline as in the broadest day, only the long trails of blackness they cast seemed, by contrast with the whiteness of the night, denser than by day. Evil spirits, black ghosts she thought they looked; and again came thrills of fear which shook her like an ague, even though she knew full well—none better—that there was no cause for terror.

With a gesture as if commanding courage she entered the churchyard, and slowly made her way up the grey gravel walk to the church porch. There she paused, leaning her hand heavily on the oaken door, as if pushing it inwards; then, though it moved not at all on its rusty hinges, she passed onwards, and entered the church, halting a moment at the threshold to look round the grey walls. Through the lancet windows to the south the moonlight struck in clear white bars across the church, and lay like broken marble pillars up the farther side, bringing out in strong relief the ancient dusty tombs which lined the northern aisle.

To one of these she turned, and, approaching slowly, bent over the worn recumbent figure which had slept in stone through the turmoil of

so many centuries, and a passionate hate grew into her face as, lifting her hand, she smote the upturned face again and again, while the moonlight shone unbroken into the calm dull eyes.

‘No husband,’ she gasped. ‘No! no husband, never that, though I dwell alone through eternity;’ and with a horrible execration on her face she bent low over the figure, staring down upon it, her fingers gripping the stone throat the while. Then, straightening herself and shaking her clenched hands into its set face, she turned and left the church.

In the brief space a change had come, and a chilly wind swept up from the valley.

‘It is cold, bitter cold, and methinks my quest is vain,’ she said; ‘the fellows of my race are spent. The sight of that white face there in the marble hath shaken me more than is fitting. I will but go round the church, then seek anew my vigil till fate be kind and ease my loneliness. Ha! how shrewdly cold it is here in this thick shade! and what is that which lies stretched so weary-like athwart that brown heap of earth?’ and she crept through the shadow to where the man lay prone across his grave. Stooping, she touched him on his shoulder. ‘Friend, come thou with me,’ she said; then shrunk away, for the wild despairing of the uplifted eyes drove her shuddering back. ‘A

spirit,' she wailed; 'a spirit! Save me, ye saints of mercy!' and she would have turned and fled, but the look in his eyes held her in spite of herself.

'Get you gone,' said the man; 'get you gone. You are none of my race. I am alone, alone, and not a soul in the wide world is akin to mine.' Then, his mood shifting, he struggled to his knees, glaring open-mouthed at her, and grasping at the loose folds of her gown, while he cried—

'Give me back my body, the body they stole and murdered, or I will tear you,' and he made as if to clutch her by the throat. But she, with the strength of terror, wrenched herself free from his grip, and ran shrieking down the pathway, through the village, and up the broad curves of the avenue to the quiet of her castle. There, in the familiar shelter of her room, she flung herself down in the shadowed corner sobbing and trembling with fear; while the man, rising slowly to his feet, stared dazedly after her. Then with lumbering uncertain steps he raced up the roadway, turned between the mossy gate-piers, and ran swiftly through the slanting shadows of the ghostly trees, finally clambering up the broken steps of the castle. At the corridor he paused, feeling his way in the uncertain light, then, stooping

upon hands and knees, he crept into the room where she lay.

What happened none may say, but the story goes that on moonlit nights a dull white blur lies motionless in the shadows of that corner, and thenceforward the owls and the bats reigned alone.

XI

As I was pondering next morning as to which of the many advertised liniments would prove the speediest cure for rheumatism, I became conscious that David was disturbed in his mind. Breakfast was done with, but I still sat over the previous day's newspaper, my thirst for medical knowledge curiously mixed with a wonder as to what had happened to the world in the day of which I knew nothing, and David was fidgeting about in a fashion quite unlike his usual brisk clearing of the table. Suddenly he put down his tray with the decided action of a man whose mind, after much vacillation, is at last made up to a desperate deed. Then from the depths of his breeches pocket he fished up a small handful of money, which he piled beside me on the table, and out of the recesses of a tattered wallet drew a postage-

stamp, with which he crowned the copper edifice.

With the point of one finger I flattened out the heap of coins—four pennies, two halfpence, and the postage-stamp.

‘Na, na, sir,’ said David, with a quaver in his voice. ‘Dinna dae that; it gars it look ower muckle; pit it in your pouch, sir. It’s hard on an auld man to squanner his savin’s in sic fashion, but I maun speak though I dee for’t. You’re na daein’ richt by me, sir. Sae lang as ‘twas the dinin’ room I had nae faut to find, for it’s Itsel’ that med me ken ma place a score o’ times, juist as if he’d been ane o’ the honestest gentlefowk that ever walked; ay, walked is the word, ghaist or nae ghaist. But when it comes tae wha kens what cantrips by the full o’ the moon, an’ in a waesome place like yon, full o’ deevils deid an’ alive, it’s time for a man tae speak out.’

‘So, David,’ I said, ‘this is a protest, a kind of conscience-money?’

‘Na, na, sir, ye hae me wrang. I’m no sayin’ but the payment micht serve for a sorer conscience nor mine, an’ an easy conscience is a sair hard thing to buy. It’s no that; but it’s no fair dealin’ wi’ an auld servant tae gie him the gang-bye when sic things is gaein’ on as auld Nickie himsel’ kens what. Ye ken weel

what I mean. Nae man forgathers wi' the deil by moonlicht for naething, an' sae I maun speak oot. It's nae juist till a man tae gae him the cauld showther in sic a fashion.' And, do what I would, I could not persuade David there had been no Walpurgis night's entertainment, and that the most he had lost was his sixpence.

'And yet,' It said, when I told It that night of our interview, 'more than likely David would have shaken to the toes of his brogues had anything like what he calls forbye ordnar happened within eyeshot. A theory as to evil satisfies most men ; and scare is easily established when the nerves are on the strain, as David's would have been in last night's black and white. To point my meaning, listen and I will tell you "THE STORY OF A MAN."'

He was a large-built, broad-shouldered man, burnt brown, and with the alert reliant eyes which are the heritage of danger and watchfulness.

The lies told in the smoke-room that night had been huge and varied, all ringing the changes of a rising scale of cool daring and cunning wit. The sallow-faced man smoking cigarettes in the corner had talked fetish till we were sick,—Mumbo Jumbo and Hoodoo steeped to the tops of their woolly scalps in the blood

of black and white, with a specially gruesome tale of an Arab slave-train, and the raiders raided after a fashion which particularly well served them right.

His neighbour, two to the right, had come out from behind his big briar, and bigger cloud, to gossip lightly of a nine days' cruise on the Pacific sans meat, sans drink, sans everything but a blistering summer sun and a genial kindly madness at the end.

The grizzled man at the whist-table, shrunken and wizened like a centenarian monkey, but with eyes as bright and keen as a bird's, twice let his long thin black cigar go out over his reminiscences of the West in '52 ; irritating our nerves to the ragged edge of despair while he paused to strike his abominable and fiendish-smelling sulphur matches.

During the intervals of an oceanic whisky and soda, the fresh-faced lad who had won our chips at poker discoursed in lively, nervous English of Dacoits and their ways—battle, murder, and sudden death,—all with the airy unconsciousness of a society paragraph, and the grim truth of a devilish reality.

Take the whole alphabet of crime and adventure—and in primitive life and with primitive natures the first follows hard on the heels of the second—and each letter had its

own emphasis. But in each lurid, smoke-drifted picture there was at least one gleam of light. In the deadliest of perils, face to face with torture, slavery or death, none had ever known the shameful ness of fear.

This view of the case had evidently struck my keen-eyed friend, for he stroked down his big black beard—the growth of a Samson in strength and fulness—and, looking shrewdly round, said with a queer twist of his mouth :

‘Some man tell us something new. Tell us of a beastly blue funk just by way of a change.’ Whereat the man in the corner, his neighbour two to the right, and the man by the whist-table tightened their lips over a deep breath, while they grinned back responsive recollections. But the fresh-faced lad put down his long tumbler with a bang, and reddening to the throat rapped out :

‘Fear be hanged! who says we were afraid. If any man has a yarn of his own blue funk, and is proud of it, now is his time; confounded cheek though, and that’s what I say.’

From behind, the wizened-faced man from the West thrust forward a lean forefinger and pressed it on the lad’s shoulder. ‘Keep your hair on, sonny, and take this tip ; the man who says coward of himself before a roomful of men hain’t no call to be afraid. When the shootin’

comes, he'll be on top—sure.' Then, with marked deference, 'That little yarn, sir, if *you* please, and mebbe when you've done, some o' the rest o' the company'll own up. I've shivered my shirt off, myself, before now, a dozen of times; an' hope I will again, though the world has grown mean and small for that kind o' thing in the last forty years.'

'Story, sir! bless you I've none to tell,' quoted the man with the black beard, looking very much as if he had a score of them under his tongue. 'But perhaps it is the swish of the water outside, and the ten thousand miles between us and home, that reminds me of a curious little thing that happened to me in the sweetest county of the sweetest country under the sun, and that's—'

'Sonoma, California,' rapped out the man by the whist-table.

'Hampshire, England,' from the Dacoit hunter.

'Darling Downs, Queensland,' from the man who had been mad; but then he had been mad, which was palliation.

'Tipperary, begorrah, and I think every one knows where that is.'

'I think,' said the man with the black beard, 'we now know exactly where it was; you fellows can take your choice. The where

matters very little. What did matter was a split rail, or a flaw in an axle, or something of that sort, which doubled us up quicker than you could say knife.'

'But that doesn't seem like beginning at the right place.'

'Truth is, it's just a bit hard to know where the beginning comes in. Given the protoplasmic jelly, what's behind? Where to commence? Five years trading to filthy God-forsaken places between the two Truxillos; two years filibustering west of the Paraguay; as long again see-saw with luck in the Boer country; north after ivory, half in sport and half in earnest; south again for gold, and striking it rich enough to reckon up the years and go home; call that the prologue.'

'Home! Good Lord! think of it! a dozen years with a stiff upper lip, and playing at short odds with the devil, and now slipping forty miles an hour through pasture and harvest-field, by hedgerow, woodland, and spinney, down to one's own people—one's own people! The stiffness goes out of the lip then, and a queer kind of a tremble creeps in instead. An odd revelation it is when the years have tramped your heart into a crust, to find what a soft spot there is, as one slips nearer and nearer to one's own people. The old folks, God bless them,

Jack and his wife, Bill home from the border
rough and tumble in the N.W.P., Ned and the
rest of 'em.'

'Dash it all,' broke in the Dacoity lad, a
suspicious moisture round his eyes, due, no
doubt, to the unnecessary violence of his
speech; 'we know all that, man; get on with
your yarn, if you've got one.'

'Well, I had gathered my traps together,
impatient of delay at the end, old Ishmaelite
though I was, and we were beginning to slack
down—it was that slacking down saved us—
when there came that awful grind some of you
chaps know, perhaps, a rasping roar, a scream
of sliding metals, the whistle of thin dry boards
splintered into flinders, and a shock as if the
whole eternal universe had stopped its course,
all crammed inside of three seconds.

'They said afterwards that it was a split rail,
but the "why" mattered nothing to the six poor
beggars I afterwards saw side by side in the
waiting-room, and not much more to the three
times as many who carried the marks of these
seconds to their graves, and not a great deal to
me who lay pinned under more wood than a
live man cares about as a coffin, with a big
smoulder of tinder from goodness knows where
eating into the middle of my beard.

'The smell of the fire didn't make me happy,

for I've travelled a bit in the States, and a wrecked train in a blaze is a sight no man hungers for twice, especially if he's out of sight in the splinters and can move neither hand nor foot. I could shout ; but what of that ? at such a time no man who can shout is worth the hunting for. It's where the grim suggestive silence is that the workers instinctively turn ; the man who can shout may wait until the worst is known.

‘So for twenty eternal minutes I lay there and howled, the beastly singeing stifling me every time I drew breath, and the circle of frizzling hair slowly widening its diameter. Even in my shouting caution was necessary, lest by the fanning of my breath the smouldering red spot should become a flame before its time. The fall of a splinter might precipitate the catastrophe, and the first glimmer of living fire meant death to myself and God alone knew to how many more. The only hope was that help would come before the spark awoke and stretched itself, and so I shouted on ; oh, yes, I shouted, but with caution.

‘I suppose those twenty minutes fretted the nerves more than I thought, but it was not then that the blue funk came ; that was later.

‘Presently, through the turmoil and confusion, hoarse cries and lamentations, a voice called

out, “Can you wait ten minutes and hold your own? for there are a dozen who can’t;” and I called back, “It’s fire that won’t wait, and not I. Lend a hand, Ned, old man, for the Lord’s sake, or worse will come of it.” You see my ear was keen, and there was no beam pinning down *his* chest to roughen the voice.

‘There was half a minute’s pause—half a minute; no, five seconds, less—but a silence fell on me like a stroke of doom, then a gasp, a sob almost, “Jem! Good Lord;” and I heard the rattle and rasp of the splintered timber flung this way and that. Then there came a dash of light in my eyes, and a breath of wind that drove the smoke into my nostrils and quickened the smouldering ash into a blaze, which Ned’s broad hand crushed out at the first twinkle.

‘What happened next doesn’t go for much, you can guess for yourselves what the wrecked train looked like, it’s none of my yarn; but inside of fifteen minutes I was up to my neck in it all, working like an angel, no bones broken, and nothing to show for the smash but the ragged hole in my beard; or rather a burnt stubble. The flicker of fire had shot across the hair and left from four to five inches of charred brush; and a small price I thought it to pay when I saw the afternoon’s work laid out before us.

‘We’ll call that the end of Act I. and ring the

curtain up on the next scene ; which, if our friend with the long tumbler will allow, we will call, "The bosom of the family," "Home, sweet Home," or anything else you like of domestic bliss.

'We were rather a crowded lot, for you see it was August, and only a day or two short of the twelfth, so a pile of men were down for the shooting, and half of them had wives ; though what women want at a shoot is more than I can tell. A crowded lot : especially with the one or two chippy folks taken in from the smash. But for all the crowd a stretcher in old man Bill's room was enough of a luxury to whisper that the good time coming had come at last. No doubt you get sheets aboard ship : all you fellows get 'em every night ; but fair and square now, what are they as sheets alongside of a shake-down under the old folks' roof-tree ? Why, nothing, nothing at all ; after all, perhaps it wasn't only the sheets, for it's odd how a man's heart warms up when the crust wears thin.

'I think I told you that Bill had been keeping up his training in the bickerings, or worse, of the N.W.P. ; and by all accounts they knew how to keep the British soldier active in these parts. A few odds and ends of gold gods, or devils, are not much to show for the best years of a man's life, and that seemed to be all the

loot he had. Devils they were, I take it, if one might judge by murderous things in the way of weapons hung round his room to prove how border-men love one another: kries, yataghans, swords, knives, the Lord knows what all. But to my mind the most devilish of all the battle, murder, and sudden death collection were a couple of snakes, live beggars, which he treasured up in two glass cases. It seems to me that since the days of Eden it has been part and parcel of human nature to abhor snakes; and to see these cruel-eyed, cunning little wretches, writhing, curling, twisting, gave me the shivers.

‘In spite of the crowd in the house we had turned in early. Somehow it seemed hardly decent to sit up smoking and drinking whiskies when that grim line of sheeted figures lay not a pistol-shot away. The women-folk were a bit used up, and after they took their candles the men weren’t long in dropping off in ones and twos, so that by midnight the house was as silent as that room with the six peaceful tenants.

‘Though it was a sweltering hot August night we hadn’t turned in ten minutes before Bill’s reminiscences grew vaguer and vaguer, until at last a terrific yarn of some ticklish hill work drifted into a mumble, and from a mumble into a sleep like the sleep of the dead. No blame

to him, for his day's work had been a heavy one, and he had not had those twenty minutes of fire to tangle his nerves. Then a common thing happened. First there was the rustle of a whisper in the trees, a sudden moaning round the house ; then a roar of straining timber and one of those sudden summer storms had burst and was doing its level best to howl the house down. With a rush it pelted in at the open window, gripped the folds of the curtain and sent them trailing into the room, so that for a moment I had a glimpse of a turmoil of clouds and the point of a thin moon struggling like a pale spark in smoke. Then there was such a crash of splintered glass as woke up even Bill ; and as suddenly as it sprung up the storm died down, and in an instant almost the room was in silence and darkness.

““Where are the matches, old man ?” I called out as I heard Bill turn in bed ; “you lie quiet and I'll get up and repair damages.”

““My God,” he called back, “for your life's sake don't stir till daylight ; one of these beasts of snakes is loose and that's death.”

““Death to it, I hope, the brute,” I answered “I'll get up and see. There's not much risk, and anything's better than having that wicked devil crawling round all night.”

““Lie still, man, lie still I tell you. You don't

know what you are talking about ; why, I once saw a man struck by one of these beasts, a man bigger and stronger than you are, and he was dead in four minutes. It dropped from a hammock on his shoulder and struck him in the throat. Dead in four minutes, and a sight to sicken a navvy inside of an hour. For God's sake lie still, and we'll break the beast's back when daylight comes in."

'And so we lay where we were ; and, will you believe it ? we dropped asleep. To him, I suppose, with his constant companionship with the brutes, a loose snake more or less meant nothing ; and as for me—well, I daresay most of you have slept in queer places at one time or another, and I was fairly worn out.

'The burst of wind had brought rain with it, and after the rain came a wave of heat, so that I had flung the blanket from me and lay with no covering but the sheet, and yet I awoke with a horrid sense of choking oppression. It wasn't so much a grip on the throat, but rather a weight as of a heavy hand pressing down on the chest. Evidently I had not slept long, for the room was as intensely dark as ever, with not even a square of grey to show where the window stood open behind the curtain. The first consciousness was of the pressure on the chest, the second that while asleep even the

sheet had been flung back, and that I lay in my sleeping suit with the jacket open at the throat. Instinctively I raised my hand, moving it upward to my throat, and at the instant there came a third consciousness, that of a restless play upon the naked flesh which drove my heart against my ribs like a hammer.

‘In a flash I understood it all—it was the snake. In the brief period of uneasy sleep the pillow had been pushed aside, and as I now lay, even had there been light, I could not, without more motion than I cared to risk, have seen the beast.

‘What was it Bill had said? Struck in the throat and dead in four minutes. No, there were no chances to be taken, at least in the darkness. Up and down, like the incessant play of finger-tips, the coils twined and interwove, until, straining my ears to listen, there came the faint fret of the dry scales as they grated one against the other. Then, and for the next two mortal hours was my time of blue funk, and, taking it all round, I’m not ashamed to own up and say so. Yes, it’s easy to say, Why not do this, why not do that? The fellow who isn’t in the hole can always see twenty ways to climb out.

‘Jump up and fling it off? Perhaps so; the chances were about even it would slip into the

folds of the jacket and strike at leisure. Help lay ten feet away and a call would be easy, were it not that every breath startled the creature into increased restlessness ; and even had help been at hand, who knew what might follow the sudden splutter of a light ? and so I lay, and waited. Curious over what a wide range memory travels when the brain's at tension. A word of my childhood came back with a comprehension it had never had before —more than they that watch for the morning. That watch for the morning ! Heavens ! how I watched, and how I wearied and sickened in the watchfulness ! Once only, with the first grey of the light, I made a cautious attempt to move, but at the first turn of the head there was a motion as of the creature thrusting itself across my naked chest, and taking warning thence-forward I lay quiet.

‘What is that tag of Shakespeare’s ?—“Time and the hour run through the roughest day ” ; slowly the dark grew grey, and presently there was light enough to see the shadows. Vague outlines started out from gloomy nooks and took fantastic shapes of evil boding. The room was full of crawling lines. They quivered on the walls, wound stealthily from corners and lay in heaped and knotted masses in every dim open space. All nerves, that I knew ; but at a sudden

glint of light from the floor I lost grip, and broke into a gasping cry that fairly scared Bill bolt upright in his bed, while I held my breath and shook at the rasping on my chest. Then I spoke, very quietly, not to disturb the creature.

“Bill, old man, pull yourself together; are you awake?” and Bill answered grimly, “Awake? I should think so: you took care of that.”

“Then listen, that thing is coiled up on my chest, has been there these two hours, and I daren’t move head, hand, or foot. You must kill it, somehow.” There was silence for ten seconds, and then a gasp that scared me even more than the snake had done, for Bill wasn’t given that way, and the danger grew clearer than ever. But when he spoke it was coldly short and sharp.

“All right, I’ll see to that; you lie still.” No fuss or bluster about Bill.

Very quietly he slipped out of bed, and presently I saw the blind creep up inch by inch soundlessly, and letting in light so gradually as not to arouse the creature. Then out of a case lying on the table by the window he took a revolver, a serviceable tool with a long barrel, for I saw it glimmer in the light.

“Screw your nerves up,” he said, “I know the ways of the beast; it will rear itself up on

its coils, and then—it's not the first time I've cut such a brute short by the head."

'Quietly he slipped across the floor, avoiding the broken glass, whose sudden gleam had so shaken my self-possession, raised his revolver, and let it drop again with a gasp.

"Quick, quick," I groaned out; "it's on the strike."

"Quick yourself," said Bill, with a laugh which choked in his throat. "Quick yourself, there's nothing there but your jolly old stubble of a beard," and he lifted from the floor a fragment of broken looking-glass.

'But I tell you it was a bad case of blue funk all the same.'

'You run too much in a groove,' I said; 'your stories are all stories of men, which is a weakness, since woman is the pivot of the world upon which all things turn.'

It reached forward an indolent outstretched forefinger, and waving it back and forwards, answered rudely—

'You have an inveterate bad habit of talking nonsense. Did I not give you the story of Marie Blatoff, and you passed her by to rail at a common scoundrel like Dmitri Isanban? A man's glory may be his strength and courage; a woman's is her faith and sacrifice. Yet she

has strength and courage too, though the one may not be that of muscle, nor the other of action. There was a slight anecdote told the same evening as our black-bearded friend's narration which illustrates this. Not a story; no. A mere episode, told by the lean-faced man from the West, but it struck a higher key than usually sounds when woman, whether in the abstract or particular, is the subject in such a place.

'By the way,' I broke in, 'why is it that a man who would be a Bayard in act, talks like——?' but It waved Its hand deprecatingly and interrupted in Its turn. 'The asking of conundrums has always seemed to me a dull form of amusement, and you have a proverb which, entirely without personal application, says that a fool can ask a question a philosopher cannot answer. But this is the anecdote.'

When our friend with the black beard had finished his story, he turned to the man from the West and said—

'I think you told us something about shivering your shirt off. Suppose you let us hear why you proposed to set about it; the call lies with me, I think?'

'Right you are, sir,' said the other, 'and though my tale won't be so long in the tellin',

suppose we change places. It's easier to talk, drink, or shoot, if so be you can see the other man's eyes. For my part I think the only time a man fears death himself is when he doesn't meet him straight in the face. Thank *you*, sir, that's the square thing.'

'Now, will some man ring up the steward? Thank you, gentlemen, one bell's as good as six, but I guess that steward 'll hump himself for once in his life. I sometimes think the good Lord was growin' tired - like when he made stewards, and so they—— Oh, say, steward, a double - shotted rye if you please, an' a small soda 'll be about right.'

'I don't know, sir, that you put a name to your yarn, but I guess I'll christen it for you; "A man's grit" about fills the bill, for if there's one thing more than another that shows the sand a feller has in him, it's that waitin', waitin', waitin', an' Kingdom Come fingerin' your life-strings the hull time.'

'Some ways my yarn's like yours, but just with this differ, it's about the grit of a woman; an' God rest her, she was worth six o' such men as me any day o' the week.'

It was in a curious weather-beaten voice that he went on, a voice like a hoarse flute; and as he spoke the rustlings and the murmurs of the smoke-room were hushed one by one, so

that at each pause there was a dead silence, broken only by the swish of the water, the toppling of a wave crest, and the faint complaint of the wind through the cordage.

For half a minute he sat staring as if into a fathomless void, yet straining after something he knew was there, the eyes misty and the thin lips compressed almost into a definition of Euclid. Then he sat up with a jerk, shaking himself much like a wire-haired terrier after a sudden douche, and said—

‘Wa’al, as I was sayin’, I wasn’t always a walkin’ demonstration o’ human anatomy; no, sir. Way back in the fifties, I was a mighty likely lookin’ young feller. None so tall, mebbe, but well set up, an’ with as steady an eye ’long a gun bar’l as most. Changed times, but if ye go through forty years o’ blood an’ thunder, like me, mebbe ye’ll have even less skin an’ bone to show at the end.

‘It was in the fall o’ ’62 my yarn takes root, but I tipped ye the fifties to show I was no greenhorn when we started down through the Bad Lands makin’ for Texas. There wasn’t much o’ a train all told; only two prairie schooners an’ a waggon, or, to put it into human items, seven men, four women, an’ a devil o’ an Injun who was guide and scout. No common Injun this, mind ye, but a settle-

ment man ; a brave caught young, seventeen or eighteen or thereabouts, an' given a Government eddication ; a Christian Injun, ye understand ; a dross beast with a skin o' lacquer on him, curse him.

'Ten or fifteen miles afore noon, then pull up and camp a couple o' hours, an' peg on another ten or fifteen miles afore sundown, that's the rooteen. It's poor work, when even a crawlin' road like them in the West 'll do a day's journey now in an hour; but with heavy waggons, an' a long pull to Austin, horseflesh wouldn't stand more.

'I guess the day in an' day out yarn don't fetch ye. It's too much like Mark Twain's schoolboy's diary, every day a mortal pattern o' the day afore, an' the next, an' the next, an' the next.

'Beyond a fever that dropped one man on the road, we made Santa Fe with all hands well. Primed up there for a couple o' days, an' trackin' it through Las Vegas we crossed the Moro an' held it right down to the Canadian, followed the water over the border o' the Lone Star State, and started South. Any o' you fellers know that country ? No ? wa'al ye've another blessin' to say Amen to, that's all. 'Taint much to boast o' now, but in them days it was a case o' Sacred to the memories o' Coyotes, Comanches, an' God-

forsaken prairie schooners. Our game was to make a trail along the head waters o' the Red River an' forks o' the Brazos, an' so strike one o' the three or four feeders o' the Colorado, an' then follow the stream to Austin.

'A roundabout? wa'al, you bet. Why not have followed the Pecos, an' taken the El Paso road right along? Wa'al, Copperhide didn't choose to, that's all, an' had his own reasons, I 'spose.

'Give the devil credit for any good ye can find in him—I'm not sayin' it's much—an' let Copperhide have his due, he knew his country well, an' struck the water-tracks straight every time. It wasn't his first journey by a many, an' these beggars seem to know the scent o' water anyhow. I guess it's once an Injun always an Injun, whether it's a case o' instinct or pure deviltry, though with them pr'aps one's the same as t'other.

'It's a brute o' a country, an' that's a fact; but Copperhide had the knack o' pickin' out spots o' greenery for campin' in that kind o' heartened ye up for the next day's grind, an' it's in one o' these places that this yarn o' a woman begins an' ends.

'Our men folk were right enough; usual sort, half-settler, half-hunter. Three o' them owned three o' the women, but, thanks be,

there were no children. As for the women, them three could take an' rough it wi' the men, an' never grumble more than kept nature alive ; but the fourth was a little slim slip o' a girl, a milk an' water Missy, with a white face an' a weak peeky voice until she came to singin' ; then you knew how 'tis God came to pack so much music into the size o' a bird. Her voice just lifted your heart right into your throat. As for muscle an' sinew an' pluck, ye couldn't say which o' the three there was least o'.

' That's the men and the women, now for Copperhide. Black Snake he called himself, an' as a name for him I hain't anythin' against it. A settlement brave, I told ye; not a heathen, but a sight worse, for an honest heathen's a clean man alongside o' such a veneered scoundrel like him, wi' his twenty generations o' medicine-men fillin' him to the skin wi' pison. Twenty generations o' callous cruelty, cunning treachery, an' heathen devilishness. A blooded tiger held by a child's leadin' strings, an' that was about the size o' it.

' Every night we kind o' what you fellers would have called laagered up ; lit a fire in the middle o' the camp and sat around. Then it was that girl uster sing, an' opposite side o' the fire Black Snake would sit, smokin' his corncob pipe, an' his black beady eyes glowerin'

like the Old Sarpint. Plantation songs she'd sing, or old ballads—"Swanee River" an' "Annie Lisle"—an' then every night she'd end up wi' some old-time Methody hymn or other; an' then the boys'd stand up an' take their hats off like in church, all but Copperhide. He took it different, though I paid no 'count to it at the time. First he'd stir uneasy-like, an' a red glare would flare up in his eyes; and reg'lar, night by night, he'd grubble up a bit o' clay in his fingers, an' mould an' shape it in his palm, and then chuck it in the fire, glowerin' at the girl the hull time, an' his lips mutterin' under breath: sayin' prayers backward, I guess, or some such kind o' Mumbo-Jumbo work. For a week or more we'd hugged the Colorado mighty close, an' every day was puttin' twenty-five or thirty mile more between us an' the Comanche country; so it came about that the watch grew slack, an' we just left everythin' to Copperhide, an' what for no? Hadn't he scouted for half a dozen gangs bound Texas way, though I don't know as any o' them ever saw Austin?

'Wa'al, one night I was waked up in that kind o' hurry that a man don't hanker after twice in his life; an' this is what I saw, when the daze o' the fire was out of my eyes. The fire flamin' up like fury, an' Black Snake pilin'

in pine knots to help it blaze, the three waggons drawn up t'other side, an' one o' the men lyin' between, bundled up in a way that told me what for; four men under cover o' the waggons blazin' into the dark, an' three women in the tilt o' one o' the schooners usin' their guns as cool an' straight as a man.

'It warn't a fair fight; couldn't ha' been, though we were man for man instead o' eight again four score. Outside it was black as a wolf's throat, an' ye couldn't see a hand's breadth. Inside it was light as day, and the brutes could pick us off like sittin' rabbits, an' did. No, it was no fair fight, an' the end came in the blink o' your eyes.

'Into the shadows beyond lurched one o' the women; pray God she was dead. Another spun round and round in the tilt o' the waggon an' dropped across the tailboard; an' as the third struck down at a copper face as it loomed into the flash o' the blaze, there was a leap up, an' a glimmer o' steel an' a screech. An' same time, quick as I tell it, the men were rolled over with scarce time for a groan. How else in the flare o' light that treacherous hound had set flamin' behind them?

'Quick it was, I tell ye; for I saw it all between the first gasp o' breath at the sight an' a dash across the fire; for Black Snake

swung his gun as I passed, an' stretched me out on the grass as one dead ; an' it was broad day before sense came back. There was a time as the dimness cleared up that I cursed the scoundrel for not hittin' the heavier, an' so puttin' an end to it all ; for things didn't look pretty as the blood mist passed away an' my brain was my own again.

' The waggons had been smashed up an' piled on the fire, an' into the blazin' heap they had chucked the dead whites, scalped o' course ; little that mattered, an' sickenin' an' all as it was I caught myself envyin' the poor waste bits of humanity charrin' there in the embers. Their troubles were over anyhow, but mine—an' I pulled myself together with a start. Molly ! what o' Molly ? The poor frightened child had been hidden away while the fight went on, an' the brutes must have got her—alive !

' The lookin' round brought the brutes about me like flies, an' with them came Black Snake, a jeer on his face that shook my anger up more than all the murderers o' the night.

' I was tied back-up to a pine trunk an' facin' down the glade where the camp had been ; now they slewed me round t'other side, an' there, three yards away, was Molly. She was dressed in a long flannel night-gown

down to her feet, an' with her hair wisped over her shoulders, an' stragglin' in tangles across her face. Such a pitiful, peeky white face, with the cheeks fallen in, an' the lips gone bloodless in the terror o' the night. Weak as she was, there'd been some kind o' a struggle, for her gown was torn open at the throat, showin' up the thin, bony chest.

‘Wa’al, if the bitterness o’ cursin’ was hot in me before, the impotence o’ wrath was somethin’ worse at the sight o’ the girl, an’ that smilin’ brute standin’ between, an’ lookin’ us up an’ down.

““Hey, missy,” says he, “no sabby song now, maybe?” Then he turned on me. “Maybe you think better not so thick head. You think so by-m-by. Don’t often catch you folks alive. See there, missy, my kind that way rather,” an’ by the girl’s face I knew he pointed to the ghastly flarin’ heap in the camp fire.

‘Wa’al, I guess a short yarn’s the best, an’ the end o’ it was this. He cleared the space ’tween me an’ Molly, an’ what for I don’t know, but he hitched me round the tree so’s only by strainin’ back I could see even the outlines o’ the girl.

““You sabby me,” he said, “settlement man? No—a lie—Black Snake, Black Snake once an’ Black Snake all the time! You

settlement man, white man, now see," an' he beckoned to the group behind him, an' one brought him a somethin' on a stick—a thing o' rags an' jay's feathers, wi' a daubed face lookin' out o' a thatch o' medicine grass, an' a wolf's tail on the top.

‘Then he pointed up an' went on.

‘“White man's God, red man's God; now see, which you have, settlement white man, him or him? Go free, or——” an' the crowd parted right an' left, makin' a lane clear to the fire blazin' up afresh, an' with the bones shown through the embers. “You choose, white man, an' I go talk missy.”

‘Strainin' back I could see the white face with its scared eyes lookin' out under the tangle o' hair, an' him standin' three feet from her with a thin sharp stick in his hand.

‘Wa'al, it was a tight place, an' may God forgive me, life was good to the taste, an' I dunná what I'd have said, but the girl—strainin' back till the cords cut me I saw her face. The lips were drawn back to the gums, an' the face was a dead face agen the grey o' the tree trunk, but for all the scare the lips said, “No, burn me, an' ha' done wi' it.”

‘Whereat the brute laughed, an' liftin' the point o' the stick leant it against her breast,

an' pushed, pushed till the blood spurted, then he laughed again. "Think again, missy," he said, "that ain't anythin'."

'Then—why I dunna, for two minutes before I'd ha' blasphemed the holy o' holies for bare life, but things war different now, an' I cried, "Keep your heart, Molly, the end ain't far," an' the brute rapped back, "Ain't it?" an' pushed the stick home. But like a flash the eyes o' the girl turned on me, an' the light in them stirred me to the core. Then of a sudden I saw her draw a deep breath, then another, and another; an' out o' the parched lips there came a burst that stiffened my nerves so as I'd have faced ten thousand fires.

The strife is o'er, the battle done,
The triumph o' the Lord is won,
Now let the songs o'—

an' then a screamin' shriek, an' a moan.

'Boys, we'll call that the end; a tomahawk don't hurt much; at least I guess not.'

'Would some feller ring for that steward, if you please? Odd, ain't it, how your throat dries at times?'

XII

THAT night the first snow of the winter fell, and the morning chilliness made the crackling

flame and red glow of the pine logs in the wide hearth something more than a mere sentimental pleasure. Passing through the hall I heard David's voice discoursing to Joan as she went about her business in the kitchen.

'Ay, ay, Rabbie may say what he wull aboot yon white stuff bein' like till a plaisir. I say it's like you an' me, sae saft an' innocent like. Maybe he's richt though, Joan woman, an' I'm richt tae; for I'm sure we're a plaisir the baith o' us. As to me it's clear, and when it's a question o' a woman, I dinna ken a nobler plaisir nor a gude cook. My conscience! Adam, puir man, had but a wawesome time o' it wi' a body wha's ae thocht was uncookit apples wi' the peel on! Nae doot but there's been an ascent o' woman since then, an' it was sair needed. There's been the eevolution o' a mither by this one, an' the eevolution o' a monkey by that, but, sakes me, the Eevolution o' a Gude Cook is a michtier providence than them a'. But ye're never sendin' in three aigs till the maister? Where's your conscience, woman, wi' them sic beelious things, an' him a liver like a Hendoo idol? Na, Joan, na; twa, an' eneuch tae. It's safest, ye ken, an' I'll hae the ither; but gently wi' the fire, lassie; an ower cookit aig sits awfu' heavy on the wame, an' me at my time o' life.'

Whereat I went in and rang the bell. Clearly David's one fault is his egotism.

'You may have noticed,' It said that evening, 'that my anecdotes are drawn chiefly from the South. The fact is, your winters and springs are usually brutal, and I hate brutality when it touches my pleasure; and so move south with the early frost. No, that half-formed thought of your suggesting an association with what by a euphemism is called a "warmer climate" is not correct, and is a rather cheap platitude. It is simply this—people are horribly uncomfortable in your English winter of raw cold and mud-mitigated slush, and I hate discomfort even in others. Looked at under the microscope it is repulsive. It develops the lower side of nature, and that is not what I seek after, though you men have a way of obtruding it. So I move south, and continue my observations amid happier surroundings. Here is an episode gathered from the notebook of a war correspondent while following the swallows in '70.'

'Of the south, Monsieur?' 'Yes, of the south; and of France, for all that the patois of Piedmont creeps into my words.'

'Not always of France?' 'No, Monsieur,

not always, but ten years of freedom and brotherhood go far to weave a man's life into the warp and woof of a country. From fifteen to twenty-five a man builds his nature, at least here in the south, and I am French, a graft of France on the stock of Italy, and so the fruit is French. Fire and hot blood, and a shoulder that will not bend to a yoke. Yesterday it was Austria, and the sap of the stock awoke in me ; and that the motherhood of Italy was strong, the white-coats found out for themselves at the ford of the Mincio. To-day it is Germany, and I am of France and for France, but there has been no Mincio as yet. That will come, but not in time for me, for to-morrow it is a platoon of French muskets, and I would face them a dozen times over if I had the lives to give and the thing to do again.

‘Doubtless you know the place, Monsieur. Most Englishmen do. *Sainte Agnès* or *Sant’ Agnese*, as you are French or Italian, and to whosoever knows it, then to him it is for ever the shrine of his love, be he Englishman, French, or Italian. The blue sky above, the blue sea below, and the grey of the olive clinging to the hillsides like smoke caught in a sluggish wind. A little mountain village, no more ; but big enough, for all its small handful of houses, to hold inside a heaven and hell, an

angel and a—well—God rest him, he is dead. It was this way. Four years ago there was that campaign under La Marmora, and though we had been six years French, we had been so long Italian that none fought for Italy better than the sons of the lost province, and as her offering Sant' Agnese gave two of her children—Salvatore Santini was one, and I the other.

‘Understand me, Monsieur, not conscripts ; my faith, no ! I will say that for him as for myself. What we gave we gave of our own free will under no compulsion, no conscription into a forced service. Nor was the sacrifice a light one ; for had I bided my time at home, I had won as my wife the woman who was the one woman in the world for me. And what was curious was this, that of all Sant' Agnese it was we two went to the wars, we who loved the same woman, though with this difference, that he knew my secret, but his was hidden.

‘They say it was because of her I killed him ; but that is not so. A man may go to his death with a lie in his mouth to save from shame wife or child, father or mother ; but as for me, all the world may know that I killed Salvatore, only not for that.

‘True there was but little love between us for all that we were both children of the same hill-mother, and it may be that Salvatore's

knowledge of my love for Margharita came between us, but there was another thing. I was a vine-dresser, Salvatore a keeper of cattle, driving them daily to that dairy at the head of the valley as you go down to the town. Three times it had happened that my fences were broken in, and the new growth trampled. These I called accidents, being a man averse to a quarrel, but we did not love each other the better for them; to us of the south, as you know, as well touch a man's life as his vineyard.

'And as for Margharita—at such a time as this a man should be honest, even with himself. It may have been that having said nay once, she would have said nay always, but her eyes were as full of tears as a March cloud of rain, and with no promise of sunshine, and she kissed me on the lips when I said good-bye—two new things to me in my knowledge of Margharita. It may have been that I was wrong. It must have been that I was not very sure in my heart, else I think not Italy, nor France herself could have thrust us apart, but as I tramped down the valley to the frontier I told myself that no common welcome waited me the day I tramped up again.

'Then came the smell of the powder, and the Arch-Duke gave us but little time for soft thoughts of the women praying at home there

at Sant' Agnese ; but you may take this as a truth, that in the face of the enemy Salvatore and I were comrades, and with no black shadow between us.

' Presently there came that day at the Mincio ; a defeat, they will tell you, but I say that had we such a day here we would call it a victory and make the empire ring with the story. A day at the worst, and, perhaps, to be honest, also at the best, of varying fortunes. Our left driven in, our right victorious, the centre stubborn and overwhelmed. My share of the glory came late in the afternoon, a shot through the lungs before we crossed the river. Had it come earlier this story would have ended there and then, for our ambulance was none of the best.

' Then came the news of Königgratz, and the white-coats drew up to the mountains. Lombardy was too hot for them, and we drove them half across Venetia : our men, that is, not I, Monsieur, for I lay sick at Mantua with Salvatore as one of the garrison.

' There, in the hospital, we fought the campaign over again in another fashion. Death, the white-coat, pushing his advantage to the very banks of the River, and I sore pressed fighting hard for my life the while. For many days the issue was uncertain, so uncertain that the Sisters

sent for Salvatore, and whispered behind the door : "If he has aught to say to Sant' Agnese, let him say it ; to-morrow it may be too late." What do you think, Monsieur ? Had I much to say to Sant' Agnese ? to the one woman for me in all the broad world ? Much to say, truly, and but little breath to say it in. So in the end there were a few broken words, a pinch of the fingers, a gasp in the throat, and the craving hunger of love behind the dimness of the eyes. Then it was that Salvatore told me the truth.

'One of the huge hotels of the city had been turned into a hospital, and in the room where I lay there were three beds. In one a comrade wounded in the head by a splinter of shell, and breathing like a man in an apoplexy ; in the other, the sheet had been drawn to the bed-head an hour before, and the fever of battle was calmed to peace. So that we two, Salvatore and I, were alone.

'It was then I first knew the man. For years we had lived as neighbours in the hills, and I did not know him. For weeks we fought side by side as brothers, and I did not know him. But now, when he saw death in my face, he dropped the mask, and I knew him for the crafty, contemptible, unscrupulous hound he was. What is that you say, Monsieur ? God

rest him, he is dead? To that prayer, though I used the words a moment back, I have no amen when the bitterness of that hour comes upon me. What did he tell me? Fill up the picture for yourself: this is the outline. How that he loved Margharita with a passion that had but little of love in it, but much of what with some men passes for love. How that he volunteered for the war when I did, that he might be near me and wait the chapter of accidents. How that, in brotherhood and good fellowship, he bided his time to the end, and the Austrian had saved him from the sin of murder. How that now that I was dead, or as good as dead, he would say that to Margharita which would change love to hate—stories of soldiers on the march, and their lives, thoughts, and deeds. Lies, Monsieur, these; all lies. How that then he would speak, and win what he had sold himself to the devil for; all that, and more.

‘Then he pointed to the sheeted bed, and said, “There’s one to show you the way; a speedy journey, comrade, and no fear but that Margharita will find comfort;” and, grinning in my face, he left me stricken dumb upon the pillow.

‘See, now, how the villain overshot his mark. You may call it what you will, but *I* say, the

hand of God ; for the story of his treachery, which should have killed me with despair, roused such a wrath, and so stirred desire for life, that thenceforward I began to live—slowly, slowly, like a feeble child growing to the use of his muscles, but still growing.

‘ It was June, as you know, when I was stricken, and the days were almost at their shortest when I tramped up the valley of Sant’ Agnese, a man broken in spirit as in health. That there were more changes than those of season was no news to me. “ Evil flies with the wings of a swallow ” is our saying, and so before ever I came within a mile of the place there were a dozen to tell me that Margharita had married Salvatore. She’s dead now, and may God rest her has the amen of my soul to bring it up to His ear. With her I was never angry. Of what use ? He lied to her as he said he would, and it is part of a woman’s curse since the time of Eve that she will believe a lie, be it told her by man or devil. Of her I will say little. They had left Sant’ Agnese before that day in December, and by the next vintage she was dead, and, as I have heard, none too sorry to die. Yet it was not for that either that I killed him.

‘ In truth the part of my story hard to believe is that I held my hand, for we of the South

have more of the sun than the snow in our veins. But I let him be, even though presently he returned to Sant' Agnese and I saw him daily. He feared me; that was plain, and perhaps the knowledge held me in check. A man who fears you is not worth the killing. It would be like the eating of an over-ripe peach, a thing fair enough to the eyes, but with the flavour gone out of it.

'Now, Monsieur, comes what I hold to be the curious part of my story. More curious, far, than that a man should betray and cozen another in such fashion as I have told, and truly more curious than that a Frenchman should kill another who stained the honour of his nation in the eyes of the world. Ah, you understand now why I slew Salvatore Santini; and you understand that I was right. But the curious thing was this. When the nation awoke to war that day in July there were two of us in Sant' Agnese who waited for no conscription; two of us who flung aside ox goad and spade and gave ourselves to France, the mother of our adoption, as we had before to Italy, the mother of our birth—Salvatore Santini and myself: the two in all the commune who held each other accursed. Curious, I say; but the reason not far to seek. This time he was the first to volunteer; he feared me, as I have said, and

would hide himself thus without seeming to fly. As for me, the place was hateful with the two devils of despair and unrest gnawing at heart and brain ; and, Margharita being dead, what was there in Sant' Agnese to hold me ? Nothing. Besides, the stir and turmoil of war, the movement and life in camp and field called me. Presently we had enough of these. You, Monsieur, who have tramped with the troops, know what the past six weeks have been, for the General does not love war correspondents : and you have suffered as we have. But at first it was almost worse, for France was unready. True, we had clothes to wear, and shoes to our feet, and in July one has no need of blankets. But rations were at starvation point, and many a night the crave of the stomach cried shame on our glory.

‘ Then came our first skirmish. Listen, Monsieur. They say I killed Salvatore of malice : listen and judge. You have been with MacMahon and Bazaine, and have seen Wörth and Gravelotte, but this was none of these, no more than an affair of outposts, no, not so much, but it was the first blood we saw in the war. Three companies of us were thrown out to hold a village there on the road above Hagenau. No garrison, you understand, but a vedette, a picket. Our orders

were, Hold your ground as long as possible, but retire on the main body if seriously menaced. How it came about, Monsieur, I know not; the guard was no affair of mine, but what was true of the great game was true of the little, France was unready and the Germans were in the town before we knew it. There was then nothing for it but to fight, check the advance and retire with honour: to do less were shame. To you who have seen Wörth there is nought in this story of the play of pawns, nought but this. The village straggled along the road with a bend and slope to the right, and there we made our stand—we above, the Germans below. You can guess what it was in the narrow street at eighty yards' point blank range—sheer murder; a shamble, no more and no less. But they had not looked for so stubborn a front, and we checked them, and for the moment they slipped away to cover. Then it was that I saw Salvatore lying face to the sky a score of yards down the street.

“March!”

“But pardon, my Captain! a comrade——”

“March, fool! if he be dead, let him lie; if he be living, let those below cumber themselves—not us. March!”

‘But as they swung up the street full stride I cried—

“‘Pardon, my Captain, but we are both of Sant’ Agnese,’ and down the road I darted, lifted Salvatore in my arms, and tramped after them up the street.

‘Not many minutes in the telling, Monsieur, and not many seconds in the doing, but long enough for the Germans to come out of cover; for a bullet sent the dust flying from the wall in front, one bullet, no more. For as I stooped and huddled myself as men will at such times, I heard behind me what was both a curse and an order, and there came no more rifle bullets but a cheer rather. Beasts of Germans, we say; but that day, Monsieur, the Germans gave me my life—you will remember that, will you not, before my story comes to an end?

‘A deflected ball had struck Salvatore on the skull, no worse; and in forty-eight hours we were again on the tramp together, side by side and sullenly silent as before. But answer me now, Monsieur; did I kill him from malice?

‘That was our first skirmish, and since then we have had nothing serious until yesterday; nothing but weariness and heart sickness, starvation and disease. The only fight a struggle with incompetency and neglect. France is destroyed; but it is France that has destroyed France, and it is less than the glory

is at the enemies' door than that the shame is at ours.

‘ But on the hill there, yesterday, there was a change. There were three thousand of us on the semicircle of the slope and we held the enemy in check though they were two to one. You know the ground, Monsieur ; the hazel and scrub-oak rising up in belts like the tiers of our Italy’s amphitheatres, the curving horns of the hill half enclosing the swampy plateau, broken only by one half-ruined sheepcote ; and beyond, another hill thick with whin and yellow bracken. That is where the blue-coats lay ; we held the shelter of the trees.

‘ Let me be honest, Monsieur ; they fought well, these Germans—men, every one of them. Not once or twice, but three times their stubbornness faced our fire, and swept across the plateau under the outpouring of a fury of lead ; and not once, nor twice, but three times we staggered them back to their whin and bracken, till the ground was heavy with the swathes of dead. After that third desperate charge there was a silence, and when the smoke drifted away we knew that the struggle of the day was over. I tingle now when I think of the yell that howled along our splintered hill-side, tingle from heart to finger-tip, for I stood there on the forefront of the slope with but one row of

comrades below me, and the field was clear in sight. But there came an answer to the yell, not the hoarse roar of the broken battalions, but the impotent outburst of five feeble shots from the shelter of the sheepcote, and at the fire four of us lay down.

‘Imagine it, Monsieur ; the splendid audacity ; five against an army ! But we were in no mood to be flouted, for we were drunk with our glory ; and from high and low, right and left, went an answer in a hurricane of fire. There was no waiting for orders, but we fired in an insanity of wrath, and to our fire the answers that came were only four, but the men out there in the sheepcote were cool-headed ; for to the left of me there were two of us lay down.

‘So for three minutes, which seemed an hour, they drew our fire ; till at the last out of the dull curtain of the smoke there was only one flash and one bullet whistling through the branches. Then it was that madness passed away, and the shame of it all came home to us.

‘There was a crash through the brush, and as the eddied wreaths swept off like marshalled columns of the dead, our old colonel stood in the open, full in the front of the wood. In the one hand was his sword, with a handkerchief

thrust by the point. In the other was his cap, and he stood bareheaded as if to do honour to the brave.

‘But the man of the sheepcote would none of our truce ; for he rose breast-high on the wall, with a tight right hand on the trigger, and shouted back to us : “No terms with foes ; your men are a thousand to one, but the other bears the honour to-day of the women at home ; and may God defend the right. Step back ;” and again his flash leaped out, aimed far to the right.

‘Then out on the sod, ribbed black by our lead, he flung his rifle, and by its side his empty cartridge box ; and again leaning breast-high on the wall, he cried—

‘“Now, give me to God ! I am ready ; fire here ;” and he tore his tunic open at the breast. “Here, fire and make an end.” And from below me a coward fired. Ay, Monsieur, one of our men, a Frenchman ! Think of it, the shame, the disgrace ! It was an infamy, a stain not upon us alone but on the glory of France.

‘As for me, I heaved up my gun by the muzzle and smote him with the stock, once only, but enough ; for the stroke splintered his skull from temple to throat, and when they turned him face full to the sky it was Salva-

tore Santini. Was that malice, Monsieur, or justice? More of justice, say I, than that platoon of men will be to-morrow; but I am sick of it all, and will say with the man of the sheepcote, "Here, fire here, and give me to God."

XIII

'ONCE, in a rash lapse into sarcasm—by the way, were you sarcastic or simply rude? One is so often the shadow, and the other the substance—once, I say, you cried for "old forms," as the modern child does for its Pudge's food. I hope you will be as well content, for I think of quoting some Triolets. They have the advantage of being brief. Further, if my theory of myself be correct—do you find it easy to get correct theories of yourself?—you have simply to ignore my voice, and it will be to you as dumb.'

'Then what a blessing it would be if hurdy-gurdies, schoolboys, and vaccinated babies were more spiritual things, since, by a calm assertion that they did not exist, they would cease to exist. But the Triolets?'

'They have no name, but are, after a fashion, a love story. First comes an introspective introduction.'

I

'He either fears his fate too much,
 Or his deserts are small,
 Who dare not put it to the touch.'
 'He either fears his fate too much !'
 Alas ! that I am one of such
 Who taste this truth, and know its gall,
 'He either fears his fate too much,
 Or his deserts are small.'

Small my deserts as great my fear ;
 So much to lose, so much to win !
 What wonder if to me appear
 Small my deserts as great my fear ?
 My world's desire so very near,
 And I this consciousness within ;
 Small my deserts as great my fear,
 So much to lose, so much to win.

'Then the note of humility being struck, our lover carries on the strain in common, but quite unnecessary, fashion, since no man worth the name and a woman's acceptance is so much beneath the most adored of divinities as his temporary abasement suggests. The truth is, he doesn't himself quite believe it all, but flaunts his worthlessness as a lure, much as a fisher hooks his mackerel by means of a deceptive morsel of white rag.'

II

That I should dare to lift my eyes
 With even one expectant ray !

What wonder if she look surprise
That I should dare to lift my eyes?
For what am I that hopes arise

And such presumptuousness display,
That I should dare to lift my eyes
With even one expectant ray?

What plea have I that haply might
Win grace from one so far above?
As if this grey earth asked its light;
What plea have I that haply might
Bring gladness to my blinded sight?

Beyond the burning plea of love,
What plea have I that haply might
Win grace from one so far above?

Who knows but such a cry may draw
The answer my heart's hunger seeks?
If love to love be nature's law,
Who knows but such a cry may draw
That pearl of good without a flaw?
If nature hears when nature speaks,
Who knows but such a cry may draw
The answer my heart's hunger seeks?

‘But since a woman, having had her superiority and unapproachableness duly admitted, after all likes a man to be a man, he thus asserts himself and his loftiness of ideal, which latter naturally moves her sentiment by tickling her vanity.’

III

I would not take
Your pity only!
For your dear sake

I would not take
 What needs would make
 Our two lives lonely ;
 I would not take
 Your pity only.

But would require
 Love's breadth, depth, length
 And all its fire.
 And would require
 That my desire
 Be matched in strength ;
 So would require
 Love's breadth, depth, length.

Could love take less
 Return than love ?
 Nay, dear, confess,
 Could love take less
 With hope to bless
 Here and above ?
 Could love take less
 Return than love ?

‘Now comes the time for judicious pressure
 —the falter in the voice, the moving pathos, the
 plaint and supplication, with just a sufficiency
 of protestation to keep the newly-awakened
 sentiment warm in life.’

IV

I know I seek the greatest gift
 Which man can ask or woman give ;
 Not hard, I think, to see my drift ;
 I know I seek the greatest gift,

That love, perchance, may stoop and lift
 My life to hope, and bid me live ;
I know I seek the greatest gift
 Which man can ask or woman give.

And, urging not a plea beside
 This simple plea—I love you, dear !
My love, with arms thrown open wide,
And urging not a plea beside,
 Waits humbly. Must love be denied
 When love has drawn so very near,
And urges not a plea beside
 This simple plea—I love you, dear ?

Since when was woman's heart so cold
 That it could hear love plead, unmoved ?
Ah, let the story be retold !
Since when was woman's heart so cold ?
Love can but cry a thousand-fold,
 Until by answer you have proved
Since when was woman's heart so cold
 That it could hear love plead, unmoved !

‘ It is beside the question that the pathos passes you by, touching you not at all : for you are not a woman, and possibly understand very little about the sex. But our lover, or verse-maker as you will, has not read “ his books ” in vain, though, let us hope, it was not “ folly all they taught ” him ; so he asks not overmuch response, at least at the first, conscious that in love, as in other things, the first step counts for more than the taker thereof supposes.

V

That tremulous touch
 Of your finger-tips !
 Has love not such
 A tremulous touch,
 When it fears o'ermuch
 To trust to the lips,
 So speaks through a touch
 Of the finger-tips ?

‘and apparently he was a cunning rogue, for
 the lines end up in a kind of crescendo.’

VI

Put your hand in my hand
 Firmly—so.
 Now, as we stand,
 Your hand in my hand,
 Love has planned
 Our lives shall go :
 Your hand in my hand,
 Firmly—so.

Let us two say,
 Now ; in one breath.
 Hence from to-day
 Let us two say,
 Love's love alway :
 Come life, come death.
 Let us two say,
 Now ; in one breath.

Each bound in each,
 So ends all doubt ;
 What need of speech,

Each bound in each ?
Till life shall reach
 Time's final rout,
Each bound in each,
 So ends all doubt.

'Yes, yes,' said I. 'But your hurdy-gurdy idea failed for all that I gave my mind to the carrying it into practice. Let us try some other of your theories, they may be more happy in their test of use.'

Really It is a very good-natured creature, for It simply said, 'Theories—theories : you men remind me of flies buzzing on a pane ; fretting for and striving after something which is as yet beyond you, and careless of all that lies within your range, and, as with the flies, could you prematurely break your bounds the result might be destruction. Though you, my friend, are playing old Izaak Walton—a kindly soul enough and a simple—and trail a theoretic fly in hope that a practical fish may rise thereat. But the fish you will hook will be of a man's breeding, and not mine.

'He was a bacteriologist, full to the brim of latter-day learning, and held that men and women were but germs, bacilli, bacteria, what you will—forms of disease on this grand old earth of yours and sorely marring its perfections. Even as in your veins, said he—yours, you under-

stand; not mine!—corpuscles of health, strength, and growth combat and overcome, or are overcome by corpuscles of disease, decay, and death; so, in that which is essentially and eternally you, the principle which tends to good is in hourly handgrips with that which tends to evil, and through struggle conquers or is conquered. Your fevers with their heat and raving are paralleled by wars and the hot strife of passion; and both are eased by the letting of blood.

‘As there is that in you which grows to paralysis and death, so is there ignoble sloth and callous selfishness which in the race turns to— You don’t like the idea? and quite right; no dignity can survive a catarrh. But, to be honest, how many human toothaches do you number in your acquaintance—bores who rack, worry, and fret you, and yet in themselves are insignificant? Your full complement of thirty-two I’ll wager. Where the parallel fails is that the more you draw them the worse they are, but it’s a pretty theory for all that. Now for number two.

‘Do you recollect Gall’s theory of pre-Adamite man? That the evil spirits, devils, demons and the like, which now plague weak humanity, are the souls of an earlier and unrepentant race, who seek to play the tail-less fox of the fable. An ingenious theory, and I once knew a man

who died of it. He let it run to seed as it were, and the product of his imagination killed him.

‘If thus before Adam, he argued, why not ever since? Then came a stupendous, staggering computation, a computation before the gigantic results of which the brain reeled. What innumerable hosts thronged the air! What legions crammed each paltry cranny of space! The sandy grains upon the seashore grew sparse and lonely by comparison. Not a pin point of air, not a bursting bubble in midstream, but was packed with spirits battling for space. Space! there was no space. Air! there was no air. All was the fluid embodiment of evil. Breathing room there was none, none. The lungs were filled with volatile devilism in place of air, and struggling, panting, gasping, he died, choked by exuberant imagination and Gall’s theory!’

‘Bah,’ I said, ‘you play with me. I come as a seeker after truth and you pick a couple of madmen from the first asylum and say, Here be your theorists!’

The grave mockery, the shrewd levity that played in the light of Its eyes died out. ‘Madmen—an easy word to say. Are you so completely sane yourself? Is any man? A madman! I take a man to be mad who fails

of a healthy appreciation of the truth of things more or less essential. The greater the failure, the less the sanity, and whether that failure bankrupt his pocket, sap his health, cramp his intellect, flame his passions, smirch his soul, the result is still as in all things a measure of degrees. That you are ignorant of your failure matters nothing, though indeed the famous and seeming paradoxical definition of a libel might find its parallel in the greater the knowledge the greater the madness. Was Messalina sane in her unbridled immorality? Bacon in his greed? Nero in his vanity? Alexander in his lust for conquest? Mohammed in his self-deception? Domitian in his cruelty? Draco in his bloody laws? Borgia in his ruthless aggrandisement? Lackland in his weak cunning? Jephthah in his—but that reminds me, I have a little story to tell you which bears somewhat on the point in question and which I will call “JEPHTHAH’S DAUGHTER.”

The more I travel on Spanish railways the more I am convinced that they have been laid by the Inquisition as an ideal means of unobtrusive penance. When in motion the swaying and jolting of the carriages recall the noblest triumphs of the disjointing rack. Every limb is strained to its last endurance and every

muscle stretched, as if Procrustes had added a long twelve inches to his bed ; while even the feeblest effort at a village is sufficient cause for a conversational delay which would have out-Jobed Job, accustomed as he was to much rhetoric.

Then, if your sins have found you out in the summer, or even up to late autumn, the heat, the whirl of the dust, and the abominations of wayside smells will complete your misery. In Spain, during this period of the year, national activity is confined to irritant insects, evil odours, and grit.

The journey south from Cordova, though not a long one, had been an unbroken triumph of discomfort. The dice-box motion of the carriages was even more pronounced than usual ; the affectionate clinging to dilapidated groups of wayside hovels more pathetic in its constancy ; while a strong south-east wind, dry from the African coast, with the ungrudging generosity of the irresponsible, filled every possible air space with unbalmy dust. Even Zoracante was a relief, and yet Zoracante both was and is an unlovely place, sun-dried, waste, and wind-swept.

Do not let the poetry of Spain, or at least your theory of it, run away with you and set your imagination ablaze by reason of a vision

of pleasant vineyards swathing the slopes and hollows with a restful greenery ; the hill crests feathered with a crown of dusky olive, and the lower valleys a tangle of orange groves framed by fields of wheat. No such paradise greeted me as the lumbering coach, stifling hot from its long wait in the blaze of the sun, jolted over the ill-kept dusty road for that long half mile which lies between the railway station and the village. Burnt undulations of scant brown pasturage, sparsely dotted with breathless chestnuts and stunted cork oaks, filled the landscape ; the one spot of grateful rest within the limit of vision being the blue outline of the sea fading into the southward haze. The coach, which surely belonged to the ante-railway days of Spain, so huge was its capacity, rolled soberly down the incline, then swinging round an abrupt spur of the hill, clattered noisily into the village, in the market square of which was the only inn in Zoracante.

My chief interest centred in the church, the quaint architecture of which had been the magnet strong enough to draw me from Cordova, and whose dome and turrets, clear cut against the blue of the sky, gave promise that the journey had not been taken in vain. I therefore lent but little heed to the sleepy old-world village through which we passed ; the

more content to miss it that it is not until the half-lights of evening darken in that the sordid meanness, inseparable from the smaller towns of southern Spain, is lost in the softness of outline and graceful suggestiveness which at such times is their peculiar dower.

‘The Señor will alight? A bedroom? Most certainly, a bedroom for a prince. By this way. The Señor will take care of that stair. Ten times have I told Carlos that it is loose, and still it is loose, the good-for-nothing! A hot journey from Cordova; but here by the sea it is cool. The plaster, Señor? Amina will sweep it up presently; it fell but yesterday. Cool almost to chill when the sun has set. A room for a prince!’ Then, as a staggering glow of heat smote me in the face, ‘When the sun has gone it will be cool, and the bed!—see, Señor!’ and he lovingly pounded the knotted mattress of a couch whose dapper length gave sorrowful promise of a restless night, and, what is more, kept its word.

‘The Señor will dine? Soup, a chicken, and an omelette at seven? The Señor will be well content.’ But here let me say that, looking back on the compound of oil and onions, the muscular pedestrian biped, bereft of what one might call the more emotional part of its frame, and the agglomeration of egg and garlic, the

Señor was not well content, and so expressed himself; but that is a parenthesis.

‘The church? Oh yes, it is a good church; but the Señor should see Don Garcia Mendoza y Xichasto’s new windmill, all the way from New Orleans. There is none other like it in the whole province; blue and red and yellow and with a wheel that flies—whirr-r-r. But the church? Yes, it is open, or if not, the sacristan is near at hand, and knows its every stone better than his beads. When the Señor returns I will tell him something of Padre Esteban; only, make him show all the pictures. A worthy man the Padre, though given overmuch to talk when in the mood. Yes, down yonder, Señor, no need for a guide, though Carlos here is a good lad, and what are a few centesimos to a lord like the Señor? No guide? Well then, this at the parting. All the pictures, Señor. All the pictures.’

No guide was necessary, and Carlos’ chatter would have been an expensive purchase. The dome and towers visible from the turn of the village street dominated the market square, upon the south-east angle of which the façade fronted. There is no need to describe the architecture at any length: the peculiar bastard type so common in Andalusia is sufficiently known, and the Church of Our Lady of

Good Succour did not differ greatly from its fellows. The interior showed the usual blending of south and east, but without harmony and grace ; so that the one prominent thought was vexation at having undergone so much discomfort for no reward.

As I stood leaning against one of the fluted Corinthian pillars which divided the nave from the aisles, there was the sibilant sound of sandalled feet shuffling across the smooth floor. No doubt the sacristan, and, from his long black cassock and hood, a brother of St. Augustine.

He was a curious, snuff-dried specimen of humanity, this sacristan. Lean all over, but chiefly about the face, where the wrinkles gathered up the mouth to a round knot like a pickled cherry, and seamed and lined the cheeks with the bewildering network of a rough skin-binding. The shallow forehead was gnarled and bunched over the shining black lamps, which blazed and twinkled from under the corrugations, as if the fires of twenty-one burnt behind, instead of the last glow from the ashes of four score.

‘See, Señor,’ and he laid a delicate parchment-covered claw upon my sleeve, ‘see, the altar. Ah ! that is fine. Seven silver lamps always alight in that circle as thou seest. The

seven churches, always ablaze, the Prior says; though it may be the place of their shining be shifted. A fit light for such a Madonna! Here, Señor, this side; the light is wrong, and it is a sin against art that so it should be. There, a Madonna that is to be, as I think, for the babe is not in her arms, and the look of motherhood is troubled and uncertain. It is so with women, but that is only about the mouth, the eyes, ah, Señor'—and the wrinkled, parchment-coloured face caught the reflected glory of a thought—'the eyes, they tell differently, they see over, through, and beyond. When all the church is silent and the sun is down, so that the lamps and I are the only things alive, I sit and watch her eyes and now I understand them. They troubled me at the first. Oh! I am very ignorant, and so it took me years to get behind their meaning. It is so with men, whether they deal with women or the Madonna, and sometimes they tire—the fools.

' But now these eyes look into my very soul when it quakes at the thought of death, as sometimes even the old will quake; and then I understand that after all death is a small thing, and that the real sorrow is life. They say it was Francisco Pacheco painted it, but I think Velasquez his pupil had a hand in the work, for Pacheco never had the soul for such

thought as is there ; but Velasquez—ah ! that is different.

‘ The roof and pillars ? Yes, Señor, very fine ; and the stained glass too. But the Madonna, that is our glory, and so we keep tinsel-stuff away from the altar ; such things are well enough where they have no Velasquez. Other pictures, Señor ? ’ he looked round the walls doubtfully ; ‘ no, not after *that*. ’ Then with a tell-tale irresolution he passed his shaking hand over his mouth and chin, looking me up and down the while with a doubtful cloud in his eyes. Then suddenly the cloud cleared away. ‘ Yes, Señor, yes, one picture, one more ; ’ and, as if acting on a sudden determination which he feared might fail him, he turned to the right aisle, and shuffled with a marvellous briskness over the polished pavement.

To the east of the transept, sunk in the wall, was a gate of hammered perforated ironwork, which gave access to a tiny chapel lit by one slender lancet window,—a chapel so very small that it seemed as if surely dedicated to some dead Innocent. Opposite the gate of entrance was the usual shrine, before which hung a single lamp, larger and more richly chased than any in front of the grand altar.

The shrine itself was of the simplest. A

dome-topped picture, in an embossed frame of carved Florentine work, filled the back of the recess. To the right and left were unlit silver candlesticks, and in front a *prie-dieu*. This time there was no verbiage, but my guide turned and whispered in that subdued incisive way which touches so much nearer than any noisy declamations, 'Madre Dolorosa ; ah, Dolorosa, Dolorosa ;' then he slipped down on the *prie-dieu* and bowed his head in his spread hands.

Dolorosa, indeed, but hardly the Mother of Sorrow ; too young a face for that by more than a score of years. Rather the face of a St. Agnes, or an Agatha ; some tender virgin martyr, stricken not alone by agony of body, but riven by the sorrow of sorrows, which cleaves to the very soul itself ; for to me, as I looked, there was not only torture in the pathos of the eyes, but despair. If a Madonna at all, then a Madonna who saw the agony of the road, not the rest at the end ; the crown, not of triumph but of thorns ; not the 'Forgive them,' but the 'Why hast thou forsaken me ?'

Truly it was an entirely beautiful face, pure spiritual but for the sadness which saw no hope in that it was of the earth ; and, being the more human, it touched me the nearer. The artist had set aside the conventional pose of

upturned gaze, and the dark eyes, larger through vigil of much grief, looked you back straight in the face. Above the forehead, and the only touch of colour in the picture, was drawn forward the violet cowl of the Nursing Sisters of St. Augustine, its shadows throwing out the deadly pallor of the face into strong relief. The fatigues of the day fell from me, and I understood why I had been so urgently bidden to see all the pictures. Our Lady of Sorrows was only for the few.

The minutes slipped by me, and still I stood fascinated, and still the sacristan knelt before the shrine, but now with his face upraised and his look firm fixed on the sorrowful eyes of the Madonna, and his lips moving in irregular spasms, unlike the steady mutterings of perfunctory prayer. It was the communion of spirit with spirit, not the petition and plaint of the suppliant.

At last the silence became intolerable ; and though to speak was like speaking in the presence of the dead, yet break the silence I must.

‘Let us go, my Padre,’ and I touched him on the shoulder. At the touch, rather than the voice, he turned and looked vacantly at me ; then, as my reality grew into his mind, his wrinkled face flushed and he rose suddenly, and with one last look at the picture, but

omitting the usual genuflexion, he led the way from the little chapel.

Once in the nave he found his voice. 'Beautiful, Señor, ah, most beautiful, Dolorosa, Dolorosa. Yet not so beautiful as the truth. These artists catch something on their brushes and write it down, and for that we are their debtors ; but the flitting subtleties that are the many sides of the soul within are not for them. Raphael in the Fornarina perchance ; but for these others, no, the surface is all that they see. A sad story, Señor, and not over long. If the Señor wills ? This way then. I love to see that face through the iron fretwork by the gate. It is the face of an angel, and some day I shall break the bars and be with her. Not a long story, Señor ; but one far back as Miguel told it fifty years ago the day he died.

' How to begin it, for where is the beginning of such a story ? There are but three in it, the father, the daughter, and Miguel. Ah, you have caught the drift, you think ? a maid, and a youth, and a father between them ; does it not tell itself ? but no, not quite.

' Fernandez Dorasta dwelt down yonder by the sea ; no fisherman or sailor, but a trader, and so perhaps narrower than those who go out to face nature in her alternate passions and smiles. To them God has to be so near that

His greatness touches them all unknown. But for Fernandez, the bush might have blazed before his eyes, and he would have but cried out upon the waste. A money-sucker, a hound, blooded for gold, and ready to sleuth it even to hell itself. Ah, Señor, how the ashes of fifty years flare up when a gust of passion sweeps across them! Fernandez, rest his soul! went to his dust sorrowing, and if God has given him peace, why not I?

‘ Still, it was these ventures of his to far-off lands that wrought her sorrow, for they were successful time and again ; and the gain whetted his hunger and fired his greed, so that he turned his whole possessions, vineyard, wheat-fields, ay, his very house itself, where his mother lived and died, into money, and spread it abroad into larger risks. This to the West Indies for spices and sugar, that to the Levant for those gaudy fabrics and eastern trinkets which still warm the Moorish blood in our veins, and yet another to the South for what he knew not, but that our people gape like children at any strange things, and then empty their pockets to buy ; and of this venture Miguel was chief mate.

‘ Of Miguel it is not easy to tell much with half a century of death betwixt him and us ; and there was but one thing of him worthy

to live after him—he loved Catalina ; loved, Señor ; do you understand—loved ? then I say no more. Yet, to Miguel but little thanks, it was not wonderful ; you can see her through the shadows, Señor ; not wonderful, but it was a good thing. And Catalina ?—the blaze died out of the black eyes, and a mist was driven across them, while the mobile mouth quivered under its wrinkles—‘Catalina talked not overmuch ; I do not think true souls often do ; but Miguel was well content, and went to the South in peace.

‘Then began the dawning of sorrows. The daily fear of loss was to the greedy soul of Fernandez what the biting acid is to base metal, a corrosion and a ruin. It ate into his life, it effaced the stamp of nature, it damned him even as he walked the sands day by day counting the very hours, many as they were, until his gains would pour into his lap. Little by little the devil’s hunger grew upon him, until it devoured the very love of child out of his heart, and the day the news came that the venture to the Levant was driven ashore there beyond Oran, and its freight a prey to the Algerines, he turned and cursed her for a useless wench, and thrust her fiercely from him with a staggering blow, when she sought to say a daughter’s word of love and comfort.

“Let her go work for her bread, like the pauper she is,” he cried, “and not come fawning upon me.” He had borne with her long enough, but now that he was driven out in his old age to beg his bread, she must shift for herself, and the thought of his two ventures South and West hardened his heart, so that he cursed God for his loss, and nursed his greed the closer. Then, after long interval, a rumour grew, and was in everybody’s ears but his. For all shrunk from the telling how that a coral reef had bitten a wide hole in the *Santa Anna*, and her bones had sunk to rest until the waste of all things brings about their renewal. Rumour first, and then certainty, and when there was no longer room for doubt, and Fernandez still pluming his soul in hope, the Prior sought him out. What passed no mortal man knows. His own sins were for full confession, but on those of others Prior Luis held his peace. Men say he came from Dorasta’s presence with a terror on his face as of an angel who had seen the pit.

‘Thenceforward the sorrows thickened. What need to tell them? whoever loves can tell the daily purgatory of a loveless life, and hers was worse, for every hour was filled with the stings and flouts of callous greed, and cold, grinding selfishness.

‘Upon the point of the breakwater which runs out beyond the little harbour he built a cairn of rocks, and there he would sit through storm or sun so long as a gleam of grey was in the sky, watching out towards the straits, and snarling like a wild beast at whosoever came near unto him.

‘The sun might beat all the sea to gold, and shrivel life up with its heat, but still he sat and stared westward. Nor could the flooding waters rave loud enough to drive him from his place; he only rose and shook his fist into their face as though cursing the strength which threatened his gains with destruction.

‘At last—one such day it was—the blackness of wrath on land and sea, and a fierce south-western gale roaring up the foaming stretch of coast and wrapping the breakwater in a shroud of spray from point to base, a shadow loomed out of the mist, a shadow, but it was enough.

‘Through the drift of the sea-wash was seen the figure of Fernandez doubled up upon his cairn, clutching the dripping rocks for bare life with the one hand while the other was shaken impotently at the sky.

‘Darker loomed the shadow, and darker. Yes, by the Virgin, it is she! The word rolled round the heaving crowd on shore, then, out above the whistle of the wind, a voice

wailed out, "Miguel, my Miguel," and he who told me—Miguel, dead these fifty years—vowed he heard the cry ringing down in the teeth of the blast as they let the anchors fly.

'For an instant, little more, the anchors held, and the ship swaying heavily rode from crest to crest. Then there was a lurch landward, and through the thunder of the surf an indrawn moan broke across the beach, dominated again by Catalina's high-pitched cry. Truly, Señor, if ever an urgent insistent prayer beat down the bars of heaven it was that cry of Catalina's, "Miguel, my Miguel."

'As the ship stayed herself at her anchors Fernandez sprang to his feet, waving his hands up into the drenched air in a passion of triumph. Then, as the anchors dragged, he turned, and with the spray round him in a cloud dashed down the breakwater, and on along the mole like a madman, or one driven of the fiend.

'There, above the angle of peaceful waters was the shrine of Our Lady of Succour, her strong, calm eyes looking out across the leagues of strife and tempest. Down at her feet he grovelled, fumbling the wet stones with his trembling fingers as he hugged them to his breast, he, who these months had cursed and scoffed.

'"Have pity," he stammered out between his

half-clenched teeth, “spare me this, only this, and take anything, anything. I vow,” and he paused, lifting himself up and looking about with the uncertain hunted look of a dumb beast near its death, till his eyes met the agony of more than death in the eyes of Catalina ; and he gave a gasp, “I vow my daughter to your keeping now, henceforth, and for ever, before thee and in the grace of God,” and he fell on his face again, mumbling the stones with his lips.

‘The shadows have grown deep, Señor; very deep; but you can see her still, through the bars. Thenceforth and for ever through the bars. But no—not that, not that, some day they will break. Ah, God! are not fifty years enough?’

‘All the pictures?’ said the landlord; ‘all the pictures! then you saw Jephthah’s daughter with the rest?’

‘Humph,’ I said as It ended; ‘which of them all was your candidate for Bethlehem Hospital? Now it seems to me that madness, after all, is largely a question of comparison.’

‘Well,’ It said drily, ‘suppose you go to bed and test your theory; perhaps I may be able to help you.’ And I took Its advice, though Its meaning, like Itself, was somewhat indefinite.

Sleep came quickly, a heavy stupor of sleep

most like a swoon, but that presently the darkness took shape. There was a sense of vastness, such a sense as one gets looking east over a moonless sea before the stars have overcome the light lingering behind ; a vastness of void, so vast as to be purple-black, and across it in letters of fire this was written—*pereunt et imputantur* ; and through my dream the memory of that sundial in the old Oxford College came back to me, and in part I understood.

Against the blank of the darkness and beneath the words, a blur of white grew into form like into a mighty throne, the like of which passed my thought then and my words now, but I held my breath as I looked, and then closed my eyes as a light shone from it of which I can say nothing but that it cast no shadow. Then, how I know not, for who can tell the whys and wherefores of a dream ? but above the throne was hung a flaming sword, not of fire, but of white scorching light, and upon the blade was written the same motto.

Presently, taking shape, the vastness was a huge judgment hall, from the hangings of which, from canopy and bar of justice there flamed the same legend.

Now, as I waited, one came into the hall, whence I knew not, but the man I knew, or

at least his type. A ditch his cradle, infamy his school, misery his playfellow, vice and crime his masters, theft violence and murder his trade, and his end written across his throat in the red weal of the hangman's rope. But what was strange was that his face had less of terror than when he had climbed the twelve steps to his doom.

As he stood, the silence grew a burden, and, if words passed, I heard them not ; but it seemed as if the light upon that great white seat softened from its burning intensity, and the sword was turned aside. And, even as he came, so the man went, whither I knew not ; but another stood in his place.

Him also I knew ; or, again, at least his type. You will find him any day in the schools and market-places of the great world, and wheresoever brain and wealth meet. Born unto knowledge, armed and equipped at every point with understanding ; a man with the power to know the world as a book from its records of misery to its triumphs of mind, and who turned from the one, and misused the other, shaping them only to his own ends ; a man who plucked the fruit of the tree of this life and ate it to the core, and with it gathered lavishly to himself of the knowledge of good and evil.

Again the silence was burdensome in its weight, but though my eyes were hidden it semeed as if the sword swept swiftly downwards, and the man shrunk, withered by the light from the great white seat. Then I understood that the hours which perish and go down to our account are the hours of knowledge; and as it happens in dreams, It stood beside me asking, Which was the madman? :

XIV

WHEN David brought the hot water next morning, he pulled up the blind, and, as he held back the curtain, stood a moment gazing out into the greyness. Then he shook his head in solemn fashion: 'I'm thinkin' It'll no be lang wi' us noo! hearken at that!'

A lash of rain and hail swept shrieking against the pane, followed in the interval of calm by the rustling swish of sodden snow. Like the folding in of curtains a shifting gloom blurred the feeble light, and, as the grey settled into sullenness and a fresh blast shattered itself against the pane, David shook his head again and repeated mournfully, 'Na, na, no lang wi' us noo; an' deed sakes, but what fule wi' the

poo'r tae gang wad hae the wull tae stay wi'
sic a skirlin'?

'Deed sakes, David,' I echoed, sitting up
in bed and hugging my knees for comfort,
'deed sakes, but not this fool, I think.'

'Hark at yon,' he cried, as the sleet-choked
wind howled out anew; 'it minds me o' that
verse—a grand verse, though it's nane o'
Rabbie's, I'm thinkin'—

The first day was snaw an' sleet,
The second day was win' an' weet,
The third day was siccane freeze,
It froze the puir birds' nebbies tae the trees.

There's a picture o' the mitherhood o'
winter nature for ye!'

'Why man, David, you're a poet lost.'

David twirled round on his heels briskly.
'Hoots, sir, dinna say that; cuddle doon unner
the bedclaes an' hearken at this. It'll keep ye
quite, an' shairpen up the effec' if ye hae mair
o' the mirk;' and with bare pause for breath
he curtained the room into darkness again, and
in a high-pitched nasal sing-song droned out—

'The Laird o' Mauchpen has gathered his men,
An' is aff to harry the Farquhar glen,
But I'm thinkin' he'll find the set o' the wind
Too blusterin' cauld for the peace o' his mind.
An' the Laird o' the Laird,—may her years be spared,
Till they count as many as hairs in her baird!—

Has blawn up the fire, an' summoned the shire
 To a feast on the beasts o' the Farquhar byre.
 But the Laird o' the Laird nicht weel hae spared
 Her hungry thocht as the foray fared !
 They'll get mair hard knocks nor Farquhar flocks
 Frae the Farquhar eyrie up in the rocks ;
 An' a muckle priest they'll want for the feast,
 That they willna mak' on the Farquhar beast ;
 Tae lay Holy Reed on the mouth o' the deid,
 When the kites come hame till their bluidy feed.

‘Ye ken,’ he broke off, ‘I’m maist a Farquhar mysel’, seein’ that my mither’s mither’s cousin ance removed marr’ed intil the clan.’ Then he caught up breath again and went on—

‘A’ jaunty an’ smart the carles depart,
 Wi’ the deil astride the heart o’ their heart ;
 Ilk junketing Jack wi’ his braw parritch sack
 Flung on the croup saddle ahint his back,
 To be stuffed wi’ the fruit o’ the Farquhar loot,
 When the Laird wull whustle them saddle an’ boot.
 In jerkin’ an’ kilt to the pibroch’s lilt,
 They rode wi’ each claymore loose at the hilt,
 Till the bonny white moon cam’ sailin’ aboon,
 An’ laid the nicht sleepin’ a sleep like a swoon.

‘They hae tethered their horse where the black burn’s
 force
 Has slackened to silence its angry course.
 Then up the defile o’ the grim rocky pile,
 They creepit their way for the last lang mile,
 Holdin’ the breath as the white mountain wraith
 Was blawn in their face wi’ the cauldness o’ death.

‘Oh foul fa’ Mauchpen, as up the lang glen
 He creepit, to murder the sleepin’ men :
 An’ wae for the day when a Hieland array
 Wad steal on its foe like a fox on its prey :
 An’ bluidy the end o’ the black fause friend
 Wi’ the bluidiest slaughter ever was kenned :
 For the Laird’s ain man has spoilit the plan
 For the sake o’ a maid in the Farquhar clan ;
 An’ a feather o’ red like a flash has sped
 An’ the Farquhars lie couched in a heather bed.

‘Not a bowder stane up the valley strane
 But a Farquhar man has claimed for his ain,
 Not a moon-cast blur o’ a stunted fir
 But covers a Farquhar wha doesna stir !
 An’ ilk clump o’ heath is the tremorless sheath
 O’ a Farquhar wha glowers on the train beneath.

‘Och, my Laird o’ Mauchpen, this night ye’ll ken
 What sport ’tis to harry the Farquhar glen !

‘“Houp, lads !” ca’s the Laird, “are your claymores
 bared ?
 Mind weel, no a Farquhar this night’s to be spared.
 Child, maiden, or wife, or totterin’ life,
 Ding a’ doon to hell wi’ the ane bluidy strife,”
 An’ he gies a bit tilt to his claymore’s hilt,
 For it gars ye be ready when bluid’s to be spilt !

‘In front is a sweep o’ the burn, an’ a leap
 O’ black foamin’ waters a lang yard deep.
 Awa’ to the skies the curved rocks rise
 Like brows that are pent over sichtless eyes ;
 High reachin’ an’ dim, black streakit an’ grim,
 Wi’ the moon juist raspin’ ane line wi’ its rim.

‘From in front cam’ a cry, from behind a reply !
 An’ a thunder o’ triumph rolled doon frae the sky

An' the valley's alive wi' a Farquhar hive
That hauds them a' safe like a hand in a gyve.
For a tempest o' wrath sweeps doon on the path
An' lays them in swathes like the fa' o' the math.
Rock, bowder an' stane shakes doon like ripe grain,
An' the burnie rins red wi' the bluid o' the slain.
Then fu' in the wrack o' the wallowin' track
The moonlicht gaed doon and the valley lay black.
But short fared the ficht in the mirk o' the nicht,
An' wae fell the reivers wha faught na for richt,
They scarce saw the fray o' the claymores at play ;
But the glen lay a shambles at dawnin' o' day,
An' the kite an' the gled wi' their talons a' red
Slept gorged to the throat by that field o' the dead.

'Ah ! my Laird o' Mauchpen ! sure never again
Your clan 'll gang harry the Farquhar men !
Ye cam' wi' sax score, but we lo'ed ye sae sore,
We turned nane o' ye back tae gang hame frae oor
door ;
An' we'll haud ye a' fast till the wairld gaes past
An' the crackin' o' doom is heard at the last !

'Ouf,' he panted, 'dinna say lost poet, sir,
but poet foon'd, an' it's David that 'll tak gude
care he'll no gang amissin'. Gran' nichts we'll
hae when It gangs Its gait. I'd gie ye anither
the noo, but the breakfast's ready, an' its sinfu'
tae spoil gude meat for the servants ha' wi'
ower muckle fire. Ye'll be wantin' mair hot
water, I'm thinkin'?'

But I was rather thinking that I had more
hot water than seemed good for future ease.
A verse-maker is bad enough, but a verse-maker

on the premises, and in broad Scotch—as David says, Sakes me!

‘David is right,’ It said, as we sat in front of a blazing fire of pine logs that night, the glint of the flame shining cheerfully through him on to the chair back; ‘who with the power to go would have the will to stay? It isn’t that one fears rheumatism and neuralgia, or such like, at least not so in my case; but the misery of sympathy with a liquid influenza is very trying. I start south to-night. First I shall look up a certain good-for-nothing in the Fortunate Isles, a worthless genial personality, of which I shall tell you something presently. Then—’

‘Never mind the *then*,’ I interrupted; ‘let us have some worthless geniality if there is such a thing, the *then* can come later.’

It rubbed Its chin reflectively, and at the action I remembered with a pang of envy that It was spared the morning torment of a wintry shave.

‘You won’t mind my leaving in a hurry, will you? No? thanks indeed. Well, I will tell you the story of CARLOS.’

If Carlos had ever given the matter a thought he would, every day of his life, as he stretched himself on his well-beaten straw, have

blessed his patron saint for permitting him to be born in the Fortunate Isles.

Were the days not almost perpetual sunshine, and such sunshine as warmed the bones, and made life the luxury of the poor as well as of the rich? Could he not supply his wants with the least imaginable expenditure of labour? and was not Marinsha the prettiest girl in the whole district? and would he not marry Marinsha when she had earned enough to support him and their family, and, lastly, herself, in ease and comfort?

But the sunshine and Marinsha and his happy prospects were all so much a matter of course to Carlos, that he never dreamed of blessing his patron saint, but only stretched himself luxuriously in his bed, and thought how good a thing life was, and who so fortunate as Marinsha.

The little whitewashed hut, where Carlos lived with his brothers and old withered round-shouldered mother, was far up the hill from the sea, with the land rolling in huge good-tempered billows on every side, the black volcanic dust clothed and bound together by acres of vines.

Beyond it the mountain crest rose high in the mist, its barren rugged peaks softened and subdued by the magic of the atmosphere.

Below was the blue of the sea, with the white flat roofs of Las Palmas just showing over the lower slopes. Further on lay the Isleta, on the road to which Carlos went each day to his work, or at least each day that a ghostly ex-chequer warned him of approaching evil.

By profession Carlos was a stone-breaker, but chiefly by profession. In practice he lived in a genial way on his mother's earnings, aided by a few pesetas from Marinsha's store. What did it matter? was it not all to be his some day? and if he drew upon it prematurely, it only meant the postponement of the wedding for a little longer. And was that not as hard on him as on Marinsha? for every one knew he loved Marinsha, and wanted to marry her as soon as prudence would allow, but meanwhile he must live. When these sources of supply failed he turned to his labour.

Miserable present after such a beautiful past! Yesterday there had been a festa, and Carlos had, with Marinsha's money, treated Marinsha to all the delights of the town,—the marionettes that played under the shadow of the tall gaunt cathedral, the wonderful poodles that tumbled like clowns and shot at one another with real guns in the booth beyond, and all the ecstasy of an alfresco dinner at a little round wooden table behind an oleander

in the corner of the Plaza. Oh! a delightful time. Marinsha said it put off their marriage for at least a month, but the wise Carlos knew you could not be more than happy, and that happiness was a shy maid who pouted and hid herself unless seized on the moment. So, happy they were to the highest pitch for five whole hours, and until all Marinsha's money was spent. Then they climbed into an already overcrowded coach bound across the island with His Most Catholic Majesty's scanty mail, and Carlos had paid both their fares with merry words, songs, laughter, and many promises.

Who could be angry with Carlos, he was so gay and light-hearted? Not the coach-driver, who only smote him gently across the shoulders with his whip, and genially cursed him for a rogue, driving on, laughing the while at the latest jest; Carlos was so droll. Not the other passengers, crowded and hot as they were before even he and Marinsha pushed their way amongst them, for had not Carlos made them forget the heat and the dust? and did not the cheerfulness die out of the day as they turned the next corner and were hid behind the aloe hedge with its softened outline of luxuriant dusty brambles, while Carlos and Marinsha stood in the middle of the road waving farewells?

Only Giuseppi Molina, up in the seat beside the driver ; but then Giuseppi loved Marinsha, so how could he find good in Carlos whom Marinsha loved? Naturally he hated Carlos, and of course some day they would come to blows ; after that, if Giuseppi were only half so good a fellow as Carlos, they might be friends.

But the festa was past, and Carlos had nothing but empty pockets, not even a cuarto to buy cigarettes. Ah! the hateful day.

A handful of maize, ground into a coarse flour and then baked over the glowing charcoal, served Carlos for breakfast. His dinner was a square of dark rye-bread and a dozen of figs, together with a small skinful of red Piquette wine, acid enough but refreshing in the middle of the day when the almost tropic sun was at its strength. Such a small skinful ! it was a shame to have killed so small a kid !

The bread and fruit were carefully knotted into a gay crimson handkerchief, while the wine-skin was slung round the body by a strap at the waist. Hanging the bundle over the head of his stone-breaker's hammer, and resting it on his shoulder, Carlos tramped slowly down the black cinder-strewn byway leading to the main road, depressed and out of temper with life

But not for long ; the flutter of a brown wing from hedge to hedge, and the sudden trill of a song among the branches, was like a challenge, and he answered blithely enough, shaming the bird with the changing melody of his whistle. Ah, the good day that it was ! Even to live and be warm was good, and was there not another festa in three weeks' time ? Then he caught sight of the trim little house where Marinsha was servant wench. A cottage much like his mother's, only surrounded by cactus plants with their fleshy arms carefully swathed in dingy muslin. For Marinsha's mistress was a cochineal farmer, and Marinsha worked not only indoors, but also amongst the insects and their curious grazing ground ; thus earning most of her money, for she worked on shares, and the price of the dye was on the advance. Only three weeks ; by that time Marinsha would have added to her store, and he, yes, he would earn money too—two pesetas—three—perhaps a dollar ! And the whistle broke into a song, and all the cares of labour were forgotten as Carlos sat down under the warm shelter of the hedge to wait for the first passing cart to save him the walk into Las Palmas !

Of a certainty Christopher Columbus must have touched at the Fortunate Isles while on

his long journey to the unknown world. How else would they have the same buckboard so dear to New England hearts, and so trying to frail humanity?

As Carlos sat in the shade enjoying to the full the luxury of a good intention, there came a jingle of bells from round the bend of the road, then a slowly rolling cloud of dust which filled the space from hedge to hedge as it advanced.

'Hola, Matteo! flower of my soul, we are both in haste this morning; let us go together, and the way will be the shorter.' And without waiting for an answer Carlos swung himself up on the vacant shaft, while 'the flower of his soul'—a swarthy, pock-marked, half-caste—grinned an appreciative welcome.

'None of thy jokes, Carlos; keep them for 'Seppi when thou meetest him below. He is early astir this morning, and looks as if all the merriment in the world wouldn't sweeten his temper.'

'Let him keep it sour then,' answered Carlos carelessly; 'and lend me thou thy tobacco pouch, for mine is as empty as my pocket or Giuseppi's head. What a fuss because a girl has good taste!' And Carlos settled himself back against the cart head, puffing his borrowed cigarette in supreme self-content. He had had

his breakfast ; the sun warmed him luxuriously ; Matteo's tobacco was full-flavoured and soothing. What cared he about Giuseppi and his jealousies ?

So the buckboard jogged on past the tobacco factory which crowns the hill above Las Palmas, and looks so like a penitentiary or a workhouse, down the hill, past the Octroi, and into that street which seems the street of the washerwomen.

On one side, thirty feet down, is the river's bed, a grey line of dry stones bordered for fifty yards deep with a banana plantation ; on the other side a conduit, lined by a string of women of all ages, and the air full of a babel of shrill voices and loud laughter. Here and there one with tucked-up petticoats stands knee-deep in the water struggling with some obstinate stain, and the butt of many suggestions.

As the buckboard jolts along the line the fire is turned on Carlos and Matteo. 'Ah, the good-for-nothing,' say the elders, the wives and mothers, 'has Marinsha not a centesimo left that thou goest to work ? More fool, Marinsha. Giuseppi Molina is worth two of thee, thou and the wooden idol there, a useful pair truly.'

But the younger smiled kindly enough at the bright face with its shining black eyes and even white teeth ; and, if truth must be told,

thought Marinsha had her fair share of compensation. As for Matteo, he was ugly ; him they jeered unmercifully. Both take the raking fire placidly : Carlos, from a sense of conscious superiority, too serene to be ruffled by such petty warfare ; Matteo, because it is his due. Nature formed him to be the target of easy criticism. He is slow-tongued, and so unfit for such strife. He therefore whips up the wiry little mountain horse, and on they rattle, past the villas with their citron and banana groves, and trailing abundance of rosy Bougainvillea, into the narrow cobble-paved street, and down the final hill to the Plaza, where the buckboard, with a last spasm, halts in front of the ugly cathedral.

Here Carlos jumps off with an 'Adios, Matteo ! good thanks and good luck to thee,' but the tone suggests that Matteo had already much to be grateful for.

Throwing his hammer and bundle over his shoulder, Carlos saunters down the side street leading to the shore, pausing to devoutly cross himself as he passes the weather-beaten, tarnished gilt crucifix at the east end of the cathedral.

A shrill whistle sounding fifty yards away and round a bend of the street hastens his leisurely pace. The steam tram is about

starting for La Luz, the port on the Isleta, and to miss it means two miles of a walk along a road ankle deep in sand. True, he has not even the necessary two pesetas; but then he knows the guard, and has a supreme faith in the powers of his good-fellowship. So he clammers up on the rear car with absolute assurance. A groan, a lurch, and on they go through the narrow streets, the whistle shrieking like a demon thrice possessed as the cars grind and swerve round the corners; over the bridge spanning the dried-up river bed, and down the long straight street stretching a mile or more along the sea. Carlos is regretfully rolling Matteo's last pinch of tobacco into a cigarette, the glory of the day dimmed by the knowledge that it is the last, when he catches sight of Giuseppi Molina scowling at him from the other end of the car, whereat Carlos brightens up and shakes his open hand in the air in a friendly way. He knows well enough there is a conflict inevitable, and he does not shirk it; time enough then to look sour and savage. For the present he would drink with Giuseppi, smoke with Giuseppi, share his tobacco with him, if he had any; and, when the time came, thrust his ugly lancet-pointed knife into Giuseppi's hairy throat. 'Hola, Giuseppi! Hola,' he shouts, 'a lucky day to you; what a

good festa we had!' But Giuseppi only scowled the more, and spat vigorously into the cloud of dust flying alongside; and so Carlos changed his mind, and borrowed his match from the conductor of the car.

Presently they stopped to take up a passenger, and Carlos' heap of stones being near at hand he leapt out, bidding the driver, whom he called the Blood of his Heart, 'Go on like a bright boy, and he would be good to him, and go back to Las Palmas with him in the afternoon.' Whereat there was a horizontal glimmer of white teeth through the coal dust, a final wail from the engine, and Carlos was left to make his way to his stone heap.

A friendly hedge casts a shadow over the scene of his labour, and there in the warm sand he stretches himself with complete content. He had come from far, and a rest is but his due; presently the sun will be at noon when he can sleep with a clear conscience, till then he will only rest. Soon there plods along the road a sun-tanned, bare-legged, sturdy urchin.

'Hola! 'Rico, my soul, come thou beside me and talk; it is dull working by oneself even in the cool of the morning.' In five minutes 'Rico, he hardly knows how, is busy breaking Carlos' stones, while the rattle of the merry voice goes on untiringly.

For full an hour 'Rico labours ; he thinks Carlos the finest man on the island. Is his tongue not ever ready, and has he not every one's good word ? To sit beside Carlos and break stones is not work, it is play.

'That one, my apple,' says Carlos ; 'that round-cheeked one, round like a melon. Ah, the good thing a melon is. What an arm thou hast ; some day thou wilt be able to work almost like Carlos.' And 'Rico flushes with happiness, crimson-brown under the dust ; is not Carlos his ideal ?

But all joy is short-lived, and 'Rico regrettfully betakes himself to the dusty road again, cheered on by Carlos. 'Adios, my soul, thou hast learned something to-day, I think, with thy friend Carlos.'

The shadows draw to their shortest, and Carlos spreads the gay handkerchief before him, serene in spirit that the forenoon has not been wasted, for 'Rico has wrought with all the vigour of youth and enthusiasm. With but little more added to the heap Carlos might rest content ; sufficient unto the day was the labour thereof.

The rye-bread and sweet half-dried figs taste pleasant to the hungry palate, and that draught of thin red wine trickles gratefully down the dusty throat. Carlos is a connoisseur

of wine, and remembers with happy regret the flagon of yesterday's festa. Ah, but it was good ! white wine, too, and white wine was a rare treat. By all the saints but this tasted thin after it. Nevertheless, he squeezed the last drop out of the small skin, and sorrowfully shook his head at its limp proportions.

Then he brightened up. 'Thou hast laboured enough for this day, my lamb,' he said aloud. Talk he must, he was such an exuberant soul, to himself if to no one else. 'Take thou thy siesta, and presently we will see if Father Leon has not a drop of good sound wine for that mother of thine. She needs it at her old age ; alas, that she never will touch the good thing !'

Having eaten to the full, and cheered by the brilliancy of his idea, Carlos stretched his limbs in the shade with the comfortable consciousness of having earned a much-needed rest. How soft the warm dry sand was, how it heaped itself about him as he thrust out his legs. How good life was ! even Giuseppi wasn't a bad fellow, take him rightly ; and in five minutes Carlos, in luxurious self-contentment, was fast asleep.

An hour, and the sun had stolen through the hedge into his eyes, and with a brisk, 'Hola, Carlos, my man, waken thou,' he sat up, folded the gay handkerchief which had been spread

under his head, and strapping the shrunk wine-skin round his waist, set off across the sand, swinging his hammer, and whistling as he went, blither than any canary.

Beyond the narrow strip of sand an arid sharp-ridged hill stretches its length behind the town. From the reservoirs hid away in the upper valleys steal down slender precious streams, and wheresoever they wander there is life and luxuriance. Banana-groves, fields of cacti, gaunt straggling fig-trees, and here and there a date palm, all wakened into life by the kiss of the stream.

In the dip of one of these groves lives Father Leon, withered like a pippin; but the lines of his face crumple up into a laugh as Carlos, cap in hand, looks in at the ever open door.

‘The sunshine is in thee, Carlos, come thou in and warm us with thy looks.’ Whereat Carlos laughs and strokes his shrunken wine-skin, thinking how plump it will be presently.

Father Leon is plainly in high good humour, and Carlos is right. ‘Ah, the good woman,’ says Father Leon, ‘the sap grows thin in the dried boughs, but this wine will warm her heart and lighten the burden of the years; five years old come next vintage,’ and Father Leon fills to bloated fulness the all too tiny wine-skin—

why were the mountain goats so small a breed? —fills it to overflowing. Carlos' eyes dance merrily, and he gently licks his lips as the red drops splash upon his fingers, rich red rubies, the very blood of the grape; not that sour purple Piquette, no in faith; ah, the good wine!

The grimy driver of the downward train looks in vain for Carlos that afternoon.

The shade of the hill tempts him, and the town is but a mile away now, so he strolls leisurely along in the mellow afternoon, now and then stroking in a friendly fashion the fat wine-skin lying under his shirt. There is the usual stir about the Plaza, yet it looks deserted and dull after yesterday's busy crowd. So Carlos pushes his way up the narrow cobble-paved streets and out into the country, thinking that a returning market cart is sure to pick him up before long. Out over the dusty winding road and up the weary hill. 'Ah, beast of a hill,' says Carlos, stamping sharp disapproval in the dust as he halts at the top.

The sun is far to the west, and the evening is the perfection of cool languor, but Carlos is in an evil temper, and not all that wide vision of sunlit sea, beating itself to foam on the hard sands, can woo him to good humour.

'What a fool thou art, tramping the dust like a mule when thou mightest have sat in the

cool of the Plaza till the coach started, and then have set the echo flying with that new big silver trumpet of Taddeo's; a fool, Carlos, a competent fool; but sit thou down under the hedge and rest thyself, and the saints forgive thy folly, they know thou hast toiled enough.'

It is curiously comfortable under the hedge with the back against the dry grass, and the crickets and the grasshoppers drowsing in the ears.

But that wine-skin is heavy, and Carlos slips his hand into his shirt and draws it out. His eyes flash a gleeful look, and his lips part from the white teeth. Slowly the string is untied, ah, how good it tastes! worthy Father Leon! five years old come next vintage! what a pity, what a sore pity the old mother will not drink the good wine! and the skin is but a poor weak flaccid thing when Carlos ties up its mouth and thrusts it back where it had lain.

What a beautiful world it is, and he must tell Marinsha how he climbed the hill and is not a lazy fellow at all; lazy fellow indeed! and such a dusty walk home, but he would rest now. So, down full length, that was better, and presently the coach would come, presently; and so Carlos fell asleep.

Up the hill tramping wearily through the dust comes Giuseppi Molina. As he tops the

last rise, instinctively his hands clench like one who fears an attack, and he puts himself into the position of defence. The light is growing a little dim now, and he has to look, and look long, before he is sure that his enemy makes no move. Then he creeps closer to him.

He was ready to meet him in fair fight, but his blood is hot and he is none too scrupulous.

Giuseppi is a carpenter by trade; in one hand is a chisel which has been sharpened that day in the workshops at the Isleta; it has a blade as broad as his two broad fingers, and an edge as keen as a razor, for it marks the skin as he draws it across his thumb.

Slowly, half-crouching like a beast at spring, he draws near to Carlos, his feet making a long trail in the dust as he slips them inch by inch across the road.

The sleeping man has his head thrown back and his throat bare, but Giuseppi cannot strike that, it is too soft and white. In fight he would run his knife into it gladly, but not now. So he kneels on one knee by his enemy, and with desperate strength drives the chisel full into his side.

There is a warm rush over his fingers that stains him to the wrist and spurts even into his face, and with a howl Giuseppi flings himself over the steep bank bordering the road, into

the bushes below, where he clings, shaking. But the shallow roots tear out of the dry soil, and there is a crash and a rattle of falling stones; a cry from the puff of dust rolling sluggishly down the hill ; one cry and nothing more.

From the valley sounds the creaking of the coach, the shouts of the driver, chatter and laughter. Up the winding road swings the coach, and the horses swerve and snort as they pause at the top.

‘ Hist ! what is that there in the shadow ?
Hist behind, I say, what a chatter you make !
You there, speak up ; you there under the hedge.’

Dazed, and still half blind, Carlos staggers to his feet with one hand to his side, and draws out—a tattered wine-skin.

From the slowly settling dust at the foot of the hill—silence.

With the last words the flame of the pine logs flickered up an instant, then fell into blackness, and with the passing of the light It was gone. Truly a considerate creature to the last, for good-byes are really very trying things.

David was shifting his lank body about the hall in aimless, uneasy fashion as I took my candle. Once, twice, thrice he struck matches, and each time they spluttered and went out.

‘Hoots,’ he muttered, ‘it’s awfu’ waste an’ wad ruin Pluto himsel’ wi’ boxes fower a penny. Yon’s anither gane, sakes me! licht it yoursel’, sir, canna ye see I’m shakin’?’ Then in a hoarse whisper that chilled me till I shivered—

‘Wull It come back, d’ye think?’

‘That,’ I said, ‘depends upon the public.’

‘Hoots,’ said David again, ‘the public’s me an’ you, but maistly you.’

I’m not quite sure but he is right.

THE END

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